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She's a Beast: A Critical Analysis of the “Ideal” Woman CrossFitter in Fittest on Earth and Road to the Games

Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education

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**SHE'S A BEAST: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE "IDEAL" WOMAN
CROSSFITTER IN *FITTEST ON EARTH AND ROAD TO THE GAMES***

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

CULURAL, SOCIAL, AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

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SHE'S A BEAST: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE "IDEAL" WOMAN CROSSFITTER IN
FITTEST ON EARTH AND ROAD TO THE GAMES

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Date of defence: June 28, 2019

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Abstract

This thesis implements a discourse analysis of the *Fittest on Earth* documentaries, in conjunction with the mini-series *Road to the Games*, with the purpose of analyzing dominant narratives and themes surrounding the female CrossFit athletes. I propose that these documentaries deploy discursive narratives that produce an “ideal” body through self-discipline and controlled consumption and that in order for an individual to be an “ideal” athlete, and therefore healthy citizen, they must be willing to suffer and consume CrossFit. The (white) women of CrossFit are depicted as having the capacity to “outperform” the men, however, this “progressive” image of female athletes is suspect as CrossFit and Reebok actively exploit this image for capital gain. The “ideal” female CrossFitter is shown to be a body that subscribes to “healthist” ideals and the women of CrossFit are idealized in limited capacities, as the “ideal” CrossFitter is a white heterosexual woman.

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Chapter One

“Strong is the New Sexy:” Representations of CrossFit Women

Introduction

Up until December of 2018 I had been involved at a CrossFit gym in one capacity or another for six years. I started as a young mom after the birth of my second child as I was looking for something that would help me feel fit again, something that would connect me to other adults. I found an encouraging group of people who all liked to do fitness together, cheer each other on, and hang out outside of the gym. I had grown up playing sports and participating in CrossFit reignited in me my competitive nature. I started competing in local competitions about a year into my training and I heavily focused on weightlifting (commonly called Olympic lifting) and spent time competing in both sports and educating myself as a coach. I started coaching CrossFit about three years into my journey and I was fortunate enough to get to know our community from the positions of both coach and participant.

I came into this project wondering if CrossFit is as progressive as it is advertised in its promotion through the empowerment of its women competitors. My own experience in my early athletic endeavors before CrossFit has been a mixed bag of empowering and troubling experiences, much like many young women in sport. CrossFit has offered me a space that encourages and celebrates a strong athlete who takes up space and is fearless in her pursuit of success. In many advertisements, CrossFit media has pushed a message of gender equality and “Bad-Ass” CrossFit women doing everything male competitors do. This message seemed obvious to many of those involved in the culture of this sport, myself included at first. This project was born out of my own critical skepticism; how could CrossFit be different in its

promotion and representations of gender equity in sport when there is such a historical culture of underrepresenting, under-paying, and undervaluing female athletes across most sports?

What is CrossFit? I am asked this question constantly in many areas of my life; as a coach, athlete, and researcher, the sport of CrossFit has permeated all areas of my current existence. I see CrossFit as a cleverly branded fitness regime that uses popular and effective modalities of training from a variety of sports and high-performance training, and strategically curates the variety of movements in a fun way that fits into a one-hour class. CrossFit is also a sport where athletes compete in multiple workouts or competitive skills in a short period of time, and where athletes are ranked by a point system to determine the winner of the competition. One of the aspects of the CrossFit experience that separates it from other gyms and sports is the culture of the “box” or affiliate gym. These gyms offer a large warehouse-like space with no mirrors, a rig that looks like an overgrown jungle gym, barbells, and a noticeable lack of machines. As of September 2018, according to the interactive map on the official CrossFit website, there were 14,144 affiliate gyms globally. Personally, I have visited nine affiliates across North America and these gyms have all shared similar equipment, flooring, lack of mirrors, and a spacious industrial feel. The similar construction of these CrossFit “boxes” helps to establish a commonality among the gyms. There exists a commonality in the apparel that seems to be preferred among the CrossFit clientele; often they are seen wearing Reebok Nano footwear or Reebok CrossFit athletic clothing. This then helps “us” identify each other in daily living. I now teach at Lethbridge College and I have even asked students I have taught if they “do” CrossFit simply because I have seen them wearing Reebok Nanos shoes. CrossFit has grown into much more than just a sport; those who “do” CrossFit become part of a community

that shapes their daily, ritualistic actions. It has become a lifestyle and there seems to be a culture understood by its members.

On the official CrossFit HQ website, up until late 2018, CEO Greg Glassman defines CrossFit as “constantly varied functional movements performed at high intensity. All CrossFit workouts are based on functional movements, and these movements reflect the best aspects of gymnastics, weightlifting, running, rowing and more. These are the core movements of life” (Glasman, 2018). CrossFit is essentially turning exercise into a competition. The women of CrossFit are celebrated for their strength, muscular physique, competitive nature, and drive to work physically hard. CrossFit women are not apparently highlighted for their more stereotypically feminine qualities, which is counter to the traditional cultural narrative surrounding women in sport. The mantra “strong is the new sexy” replaces the ideals of being “skinny” and “toned” in order to achieve the desirable “sexy” look.



Figure 1. A tweet from Reebok highlighting the ideal of “Strong is the new sexy.” Adapted from Twitter. Reebok Canada, 2015.

The first line of the article in Figure 1 reads “Kara Webb’s thick thighs were once the source of unending shame and embarrassment. But that was long before she took up CrossFit.” Here, CrossFit is pitched as the saving force, the place where Kara Webb can be herself and let go of cultural ideologies surrounding such things as “thigh gaps” and “skinny jeans.” CrossFit seems to be in the center of cultural shifts in female body image and female athletes as “role models” for this shift.

The popularity of CrossFit is evident in the mass distribution of its media content such as the *Fittest on Earth* series (currently streaming on Netflix and available for purchase and rent on YouTube), the @crossfitgames Instagram account with over 2.1 million followers and the @CrossFit Instagram page with over 2.5 million followers, and the over 2.4 million followers of the CrossFit Games Facebook page. These media platforms are far-reaching and meaningful in the discursive narratives that they deploy and thus warrants detailed investigation and scrutiny. My project works to deconstruct and connect thematic social narratives that are being deployed to the larger CrossFit audience. As I discuss below, discursive narratives are powerful in the reproduction of gender, race, and sexuality throughout this growing CrossFit community, and these ideologies have the potential to influence the greater sporting communities.

CrossFit Literature Review

Currently, much of the research on CrossFit has examined how gender can influence goal setting and motivation (Partridge, Knapp, & Massengale, 2014). CrossFit markets its fitness regime to adults and to children. Couture, for example, looks at the ways CrossFit works to “inform and (re)produce particular ideas about what type(s) of and how much physical activity is appropriate for young people” (2015, p. 104). Heywood (2015) explores the ways CrossFit can be understood as a neoliberal body practice, and Knapp (2015) looks at practices that resist and

reproduce idealized femininity through analyzing popular CrossFit texts, such as the online magazine the *CrossFit Journal*. Neoliberalism refers to an economic system that relies on a “free” market that extends into our public and personal lives (Harvey, 2005; Silk & Andrews, 2012). The neoliberal body can be understood as an “ideal” body, marked by individual responsibility, where the individual strives to work on their body to comply with current social and cultural ideals of health and beauty. CrossFit seems to offer a counter-narrative, or ideal, to those “sexy” girls in sports and ESPN magazines (Heywood, 2015). There are images of women in magazines, and social media (such as the *CrossFit Journal*) that promote a fit, muscular, strong body as the new “sexy,” the new ideal one must strive to achieve. However, CrossFit shifts the ideal of what a “perfect” body looks like but not the process by which the body is a project that must conform to the “ideal” body.

In particular, Knapp’s analysis of the *CrossFit Journal* shows an imbalance in the representation of women in the photographs presented throughout the publication. Knapp argues there is still a reinforcement of hegemonic ideals of femininity through the “structure and ideology” as fewer women are represented in the photographs than men, which may convey the message that women are inferior or inactive in the sport (2015, p.700). Women were also shown to be active in photographs but were shown dressed in stereotypically feminine ways (tight athletic clothes, booty shorts, makeup, long hair), which highlights the reinforcement of hegemonic ideals surrounding femininity. Knapp also found ways that traditional gendered ideals are challenged through the inclusion of women in the journal and sport, increased visibility of female athletes, and women shown exerting themselves in difficult physical tasks and showcasing muscular bodies. Knapp also identified a shift towards progressive representation in the *CrossFit Journal* after the introduction of the CrossFit Games and challenges the reader to a

“further examination of media coverage of the CrossFit Games” to see how the Games covers and represents gender (2015, p. 701). While Knapp’s work highlights the number of female athletes represented through the CrossFit Journal, I am interested in *how* women are represented in, and the discursive meanings deployed through, the *Fittest on Earth* documentary series.

Organized sport (developed in the late 19th century) has promoted stereotypical gender norms through the emphasis of competition and hegemonic ideals (Connell, 2005; Finley, 2010, James & Gill 2017; Messner, 2007). However, James and Gill argue that “new sports not only offer new options for gender performance, but they also disrupt traditional gender performances” which is evident in a sport like Roller Derby as women are able to embody “masculine” roles while men have very little involvement in the sport (2017, p. 710). Two categories of sport are highlighted by James and Gill: 1) “New sport,” which is also referred to as “adventure sports” because there is often an element of risk taken, and 2) “lifestyle sports,” where a significant portion of a participant’s life centers around the sport and a sense of self and lifestyle is wrapped up in the sport. Competition in new sport is often directed at oneself, or at nature, and not towards other competitors or teams—as is the case with traditional sport. However, new sport is often still found to be participated in groups or a “community” while individuals focus on “tackling their own challenge (James & Gill, 2017, p. 709). New sport offers alternative ways for various bodies to move with grace and skill, such as skateboarding and windsurfing, and where a leaner body may be an advantage. These sports foster a “feminine masculinity” which relies on a combination of skills, danger, competition, and imagination (James & Gill, 2017; Wheaton, 2000). A sport that aligns with the concept of new sport is Roller Derby and it demonstrates potential disruption to traditional gender ideologies through gender performance, also, it is woman owned and there are limited spaces for men to participate in the sport (James & Gill,

2017; Finley, 2010). James and Gill (2017) argue that CrossFit aligns with the principles of new sport and as such is a potential site for alternative gender performances. While there is the potential for progressive gender performance in new sport, James and Gill argue that new sport is a site of potentially problematic gender representations as it is a site where men are benefited more than women from “an explicit focus on the body,” and the emphasis on the body in new sport limits the “potential for alternative gender performances” (James & Gill, 2017, p. 710). In addition, the consumeristic nature of the CrossFit brand is problematic as consumerism upholds and challenges hegemonic gender ideals. This means both women and men have agency in purchasing products allowing for potential disruption of gender norms. However, the marketing of sexist ideals and subtle attempts of “righting” gender norms can be seen through the fixation on the marketable fit, hard body (James & Gill, 2017; Washington & Economides, 2016)

In their work “Neoliberalism and the Communicative Labor of CrossFit” James and Gill (2017) engaged in semi structured interviews, a focus group, and 15 hours of focused observation across five different CrossFit “boxes” in Texas and Massachusetts. In combination with these methods, the authors looked at various texts from the CrossFit Journal, CrossFit.com, advertisements, and the 2011 and 2012 ESPN2 CrossFit Games coverage. They completed a cultural analysis and looked for themes surrounding the construction of CrossFit participants and eventually “focused on the relationship between the body and the performance of neoliberalism, and [they] began to look at how some ‘ways of being’ in CrossFit mapped on to neoliberal discourses in circulation” (James & Gill, 2018, p. 713). Through their analysis, James and Gill uncover three ways that the ideal CrossFit participant is discursively constructed: “reclamation, self-making, and exceptionalism” as “these mechanisms contribute to the creation of a particular and elite Cross-Fitter, despite the inclusive discourse of the program” (James & Gill, 2018, p.

719). Through discourses of reclamation, the ideal CrossFit participant is striving for a connection to the premodern human lifestyle, where one is physically prepared for the unknown. The second, self-making discourses encourage the participant to subject themselves to pain and suffering through injuries and discomfort from the CrossFit work out of the day (WOD), such as bleeding hands, and subscribe to disciplined ways of eating, such as “paleo” (Paleolithic diet where one only eats meats, veggies/fruit, nuts/seeds). Thirdly, discourses surrounding exceptionalism constructs a CrossFitter as being ideal in opposition to “others” or the general population who do not do CrossFit, and thus do not live the same admirable lifestyle (James & Gill, 2017).

James and Gill (2017) argue that the ideal CrossFit participant is a complicated construct within CrossFit. They conclude that hegemonic masculinity is upheld in CrossFit, however, “CrossFit creates space for gendered alternatives, particularly regarding women’s portrayals of femininity. Here, CrossFit provides access to a femininity that underscores women’s ability to be physically exceptional” (2017, p. 718). Within the CrossFit community women are encouraged and celebrated for building muscle mass alongside the men. There is potential for emancipatory gender performances which regards to femininity within CrossFit, as CrossFit “seems to decouple biological sex from physical capabilities and constructs a space where women are just as likely as men to become ideal CrossFit members” (James & Gill, 2017, p. 721). Examples of what Schippers (2007) defines as pariah femininity (which embodies masculinity in a way which is seen as disruptive to traditional gender ideologies), where absent, instead, James and Gill argue that CrossFit offers an “alternative femininity” (Finley, 2010). Alternative femininities are seen as a hybrid femininity that embraces aspects of masculinity without disrupting or threatening hegemonic masculine ideals.

While James and Gill (2017) conclude that CrossFit does not necessarily offer a progressive platform for the disruption of gender norms in sport, their work focused on athletes who would no longer be considered an influential CrossFit celebrity athlete, such as Christmas Abbot. My work looks at the very recently distributed documentaries that are available on popular streaming services, such as Netflix, with a focus on the incredibly popular Dottirs. CrossFit has grown quickly as a sport and there has been a distribution of new and ever popular media (such as the documentaries and other social media sources) and my analysis focuses on the documentaries and the ways in which they work to (re)produce gendered ideologies within a neoliberal lens.

There are competing discourses of femininity that are being produced through CrossFit media and by the athletes and clients who participate in the sport, that articulate the rhetoric of CrossFit's ideal woman. Washington and Economides (2016) analyzed the CrossFit YouTube channels up to April 2015, as well as Instagram posts, and focused on themes surrounding gender, women, and appearance, which mostly consisted of women who "are not too old, already or formerly very active, overwhelmingly white, and have access to the resources needed to be successful, especially money, time, and energy" (Washington and Economides, 2016, p. 156). Critics argue CrossFit capitalizes on and adds to the valorization of women's strong bodies and athletic prowess while simultaneously sexualizing and objectifying the female athlete for the heterosexual male gaze as well as the "narcissistic gaze" (Washington and Economides, 2016, p. 156). Washington and Economides additionally highlight the contradictions in the ways the women of CrossFit are depicted as "agents of their own empowerment while being disciplined into docility" (2016, p. 156). My analysis further adds to this conversation by dissecting

discourse surrounding gender, class, sexuality, and race, specifically the often-neglected subject of “whiteness.”

I examine the ways that certain Nordic, conventionally attractive looking, highly successful female athletes are glorified in the sport of CrossFit: Annie Mist Þórisdóttir (Thorisdottir), Katrin Davíðsdóttir (Davidsdottir), and Sara Sigmundsdóttir. These highly-successful Icelandic athletes are often referred to as “the Dottirs” and are a central focus in the marketing and promotion of the CrossFit Games. Figure 2, for instance, shows a meme comparing the Kardashian sisters to the Dottirs, and this is an example of where these female athletes have had an impact on popular media culture. Through this comparison it is implied that the Dottirs are achieving a superior form of femininity through their athletic achievements and muscular bodies. Even though the Dottirs are shown in a state of undress, compared to the Kardashian sisters being fully clothed, the Dottirs are appreciated while the Kardashians are mocked.



Figure 2. Dottir’s meme. Adapted from Pinterest. Author unknown, 2019.

Gender equality in sports has been integral to the development of the sport of CrossFit and the brand's self-image that is portrayed. CrossFit HQ awards the top male and female athlete of the CrossFit Games the same prize money; the teams consist of two men and two women; and the men and women are expected to perform the same movements in the same events. Also, the live streaming of the games covers all the men's and women's events evenly. Women are featured and celebrated for showing great athletic acts of power, speed, and strength as well as showing off their highly-muscled bodies. These athletic acts are stereotypically considered to be masculine traits and the CrossFit female athletes are celebrated for embodying a form of hybrid femininity not often appreciated. While the depiction of CrossFit women is often "progressive" in the context of sport as a bastion of "traditional" masculinity, some problematic themes arise throughout the documentaries and social media sites surrounding the CrossFit Games. My project examines the deployment of CrossFit gender discourse in various social spaces, images, texts, and language used to represent the female athletes by examining the following research questions:

1. In what ways do media surrounding the 2015-2018 annual CrossFit Games, focusing on the *Fittest on Earth* documentaries and the *Road to the Games* mini-series, reinforce and/or challenge hegemonic and heteronormative ideals surrounding femininity?
2. In what ways might CrossFit be offering a progressive representation of female athletes that is unique compared to sports that have traditionally enforced traditionally feminine stereotypes? Is there an actual progressive shift in the representations of female CrossFit athletes and can this be achieved by a company that works to profit from such representations?

My project examines how a progressive shift may or may not be present in the discursive representation of female CrossFit athletes especially found in documentary film. This analysis considers the ways that female athletes embody examples of a pariah femininity while CrossFit (re)produces competing and contradicting narratives of femininity through a neoliberal framework. I consider the ways that “whiteness,” “femininity,” and sport intersect and how the female CrossFit athlete fits into this picture. In order to accomplish this, I focus my analysis on the three *Fittest on Earth* documentaries and the YouTube *Road to the Games* episodes that specifically focus on the Dottirs.

Theoretical Overview

Poststructuralism will provide the theoretical foundations for this study. Poststructural theories have often been associated with the works of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler. Chris Weedon defines the movement as building on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and his work in semiotics. For Weedon, poststructuralism uses the principle that “meaning is produced within language rather than reflected by language, and that individual signs do not have intrinsic meaning, but acquire meaning” (1987, p. 23). In other words, language can be understood as “a site of political struggle” (Weedon, 1987, p. 23). Therefore, the meanings of “femininities” for example, are neither permanent nor singular; instead, they can be considered through the specific social and historical context in which they are produced and consumed, which is to say, for instance, that CrossFit bodies are only intelligible in a specific time and place.

Along related lines, Butler argues there is no body without culturally inscribed norms and laws and that “natural” and “scientific” are discursively constructed, especially in our understandings of the body, sex, and gender. She argues that gender can be performative, which

“must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (1993, p. 2). Butler calls into question the early feminist theories that describe the social as acting on the “natural” or in a sense writing on blank pages. Here, the autonomy of the subject is vital as the subject is not merely acted upon but is involved in the process of acquiring their gender identity and acting out said identity. Butler adds that gender can be understood as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (1999, p.25).

Given my interest in gender as a social construction, my project also relies on Connell’s work with hegemonic masculinities and emphasized femininities. As Connell states, “‘hegemonic masculinity’ is always constructed in relation to subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women” (1987, p. 183). Connell argues that there is no hegemonic femininity in the dominance of others as there is for men in the spiraling hierarchy of masculinities for the idealized hegemonic male. Instead, Connell focuses on “emphasized femininity” as the compliance with subordination and a desire to fulfill the interests of men (1987, p.183). Connell and Messerschmidt update the understandings of hegemonic masculinities as “the pattern of practice... that allowed men's dominance over women” that has evolved into a complex relationship between genders and gender hierarchies (2005, p. 832). Hegemonic masculinity has come to be understood as a site of struggle of dominant views with the potential to change; therefore, hegemonic masculinity is not a static concept and there is the potential for “older forms of masculinity [to be] displaced by new ones” (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 833). It is important to recognize that hegemonic masculinity is not simply the dominance of men over men, but the dominance of masculine ideals that are often situated with particular men, and it is

this that allows for these men to hold power over others. Here, we can focus on Matt Frasier as a prime example of the “ideal” hegemonic male subject. He is well known for being the “dominant” male athlete as he claimed the title “Fittest on Earth” for back to back victories. In the last documentary his performance is described as “dominant” and “nobody can touch him” as he took the competition by a landslide. The commentators often refer to Matt Frasier as the person to beat who is known for his “crushing” performances. Matt is shown mostly shirtless, with his very muscled physique, he is given more feature time than any other male in the series, and the commentators make it clear that no one is his competition and all the other men are fighting for second place. While Matt is framed as the hegemonic male in these documentaries, there are female athletes who take on these masculine traits and find ways to dominate others throughout the film. So, we must consider the embodiment of masculinity in non-male bodies and how women or other marginalized groups are able to produce a masculine identity that has the potential to challenge our heteronormative concepts of gender and the ways that gender becomes naturalized through gendered, as well as racialized and class-based discourses.

While Connell’s work with hegemonic masculinity is useful in understanding the hierarchy of masculinities that rely on the presence of a dominant form of “maleness”, there must, in turn, be subordinates which include all other forms of masculinities and femininities. Here I am very specific in pluralizing these terms; there are many embodiments of masculine and feminine traits that highlight limitations of gender dualism. For the purpose of my research, it is useful to understand gender in stereotypical terms. Not only does hegemonic masculinity affect the ways we understand and challenge stereotypically gendered ideals, but hegemonic ideals also offer insight into societal understandings of racialized and class-based representations in popular discourse. In line with a poststructuralist approach, I will be using the term “female athlete”

under erasure as a term standardized in sport but open to contestation through, for example, flawed attempts at “sex testing” and increasingly apparent ambiguities around defining sex binaries in competitive athletics as not all women are “female” and not all men are “male.”

Whiteness, Race, and Sport

McDonald (2005) highlights the ways that whiteness is imbued with power and has been constructed as “normative.” Whiteness, as the “dominant” presence, permeates through sports culture and can be seen in the manifestation of the reduction of “black athletes to their physicality while white athletes are praised as hard working and intellectually superior” (McDonald, 2005, p. 246). Whiteness is made visibly dominant in sport through the representation and glorification of white athletes and people of colour are often underrepresented or misrepresented through a reproduction of athletic stereotypes. Throughout the CrossFit documentaries, for instance, we follow the stories and triumphs of white, blonde, blue-eyed, Nordic women who have done well in the competitions, which further reinforces the narrative of whiteness as dominant in sport. Race has become naturalized through social structures; however, race is not a “natural” category (McDonald, 2005). Throughout the colonization of North America skin colour was used as the standard by which the colonized were identified and the white colonizer claimed a superior status (McDonald, 2005).

According to Douglas (2005), audiences come to understand the quality of sport and level of play through the feelings elicited from watching the game. Sport audiences recognize and interpret racial discourses through said feelings. An audience is constructing a concept of race which is formed with the argument that race is a combination of attitudes, lived experiences, values and affective identifications (Douglas, 2005). Douglas highlights that critical studies of whiteness have identified interconnected themes. First, there exists a recognition that the

invisibility of whiteness leads to resulting power structures which favour whites, and second, the awareness that there exists a normative understanding of the white insider if there is an “other” by which the gaze is focused externally. This sets the stage for an “us” vs. “them” or othering mentality by which a powerful normative structure can be established. And as Douglas states, “the point of identifying whiteness is to undermine the dominance that its invisibility allows” (2005, p. 260). Whiteness as an invisibly dominant power (for white people) structure and has yet to be identified and analyzed in the context of CrossFit and this project will focus on undertaking this task.

In response to social factors deemed threatening to men’s privileges after the feminist movements, some white men took up a position of “self-proclaimed marginalization” (Brayton, 2005, p. 358). While there have been small shifts, such as affirmative action, in gender and race relations since the civil rights movement which have worked to disrupt “unmentioned privileges of white males,” this has led to the rise of a “group of angry white males appropriating a marginal status in hopes of rescuing their own social advantages” (Brayton, 2005, p. 356). “White male backlash” can be found in relation to sport through narratives of white athletes being seen as inferior to black athletes and the white athlete is a victim to the portrayal of black men as a “dominant, discriminating, and exclusionary force whose success unfairly constrains the life possibilities of white male youths by forcing them to abandon their dreams of being a professional athlete” (Kusz, 2001, as cited in Brayton, 2005, p. 357). Alternative sports have been a site where this line of thinking has been applied, and analyzed, and white normativity is found to be supported through subcultural representations (Brayton, 2005; Kusz, 2003). While theorists have looked at skateboarding as a sport where there has been a restoration of “white male power in sport,” Brayton suggests that the skateboarder white identity is complicated and

has roots in, not entirely progressive, anti-white rhetoric “still cannot be reduced to the politics of white male backlash” (2005, p. 357). While skateboard media denies “middle-class whiteness” it then replaces it with “a heteromascularity that is often informed by a black other” (Brayton, 2005, p. 357). Backlash politics in popular culture have been productive in discussions of power, white normativity, and white privilege and to the best of my knowledge this critical focus has yet to be applied to CrossFit and the apparent dominant whiteness of the sport.

Douglas (2005) uses audience and media responses of the Williams’ sisters to dissect the sometimes aggressive responses in regard to the breaking down of the colour barrier in women’s tennis and the issues surrounding the lack of examination of whiteness in the sport. Douglas argues that whiteness is a key part in the “deployment of white racial power” and is used as a discursive technique by which whiteness is the position by which reality is interpreted without questioning whiteness in regard to discursive power structures (2005, p. 262). Media offers a platform by which these discursive structures can be understood and consumed to reinforce and produce understandings surrounding whiteness. By contrast, Jaime Shultz (2005) discusses how Serena Williams is “read” by audiences compared to her white competitors. In the 2002 US Open, for instance, Williams was notable for wearing a Nike “cat-suit” which sparked often racist public discussion of her body. Schultz argues that by viewing Serena through her many oppositional rhetoric’s of race, gender, ability, nationality, and sexuality, or her many identities in comparison to the many athletes she competes with, the popular media then “reproduces the hegemonic racialized order in women's tennis” (2005, p. 339). Even though media sources that cover women’s tennis have questioned whether or not the Williams sisters’ blackness is “good” or “bad” for tennis, there exists an underlying appropriation of the sisters as a symbol of progress and racial diversity in the sport, which attempts to further the image of equality and diversity in

the sport of tennis (Schultz, 2005). The analysis of the “cat-suit” unpacked the prevalence of popular media that represented the Williams sisters in relation to difference and how whiteness is still the normative identity in tennis. In a different context like CrossFit, however, there are few athletes of colour; white athletes, by default, seem to be “the fittest on earth”, a title that is often accompanied by celebrity status.

Methodology

In keeping with the poststructuralist framework, this analysis looks at the intersection of language and power, and then employs a critical discourse analysis as a methodological tool to peel away the layers of representations of gender, race, and sexuality in documentaries focusing on CrossFit. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) offers an insightful way to unpack the production and reproduction of power surrounding gender, race, and sexualities. CDA brings to light the ways in which “common sense” is understood and constructed through biased representations (Fairclough, 1995). Lazar adds that “bringing CDA and feminist studies together in proposing a ‘feminist critical discourse analysis’ ... [in particular] aims to advance a rich and nuanced understanding of the complex workings of power and ideology in discourse in sustaining (hierarchically) gendered social arrangements” (2007, p. 141). Since gender representation is the focus of this project critical feminist discourse analysis offers an intentionally focused lens to look at the data and themes collected throughout this project.

Discourse can be described as “ways of representing aspects of the world – the processes, relations, and structures of the material world, the ‘mental world’ of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth, and the social world” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 124). Discourse analysis strives to deconstruct, understand, and interpret social problems, texts, images, spoken word, and interactions; therefore, it provides a medium by which we can begin to deconstruct the power

dynamics surrounding the construction of gender and gender politics. In my analysis, documentaries are used as a social text to unpack some of these themes of power dynamics deployed to the greater CrossFit community.

Documentaries offer a media platform which influences the ways that people are informed about their current and historical developments, which is particularly significant as documentaries imply a level of fact and/or truth (Pollak, 2008). This can be problematic as one interpretation of events is curated to give a “truth” that is actually a constructed perception or view of events. The titles that I will be analyzing are produced by CrossFit HQ and are consistent with Pollak’s (2008) definition of documentary as a film which is created or produced by the company which broadcasts it. These documentaries offer an insightful look into the many ways female athletes are represented, the many ways that commentators converse with them, and about them, the ways they share information about themselves and are seen in various types of action. While dialogue is important to discourse analysis, I am interested in what is beyond the text. There are layers of meaning in the way words are used, when they are used, and what imagery or music is paired with these words. The ways visual syntax and verbal syntax can overlap and counter each other is considered visual semiotics (Pollak, 2008). Visual semiotics can highlight the relationship between visual and verbal representations of gender that can hold and create meaning. There are also social media sources directly connected to these documentaries and the athletes featured in them. For example, YouTube features a *Road to the Games* series that follows some of the successful athletes as they train and prepare for the Games.

For this project, I have chosen the CrossFit *Fittest on Earth* documentary series, *Fittest on Earth: The Story of the 2015 Reebok CrossFit Games* (2016) (FoE1), *Fittest on Earth: A*

Decade in Fitness (2017) (FoE2), and *The Redeemed and the Dominant: Fittest on Earth* (2018) (FoE3) which cover the 2015-2017 annual CrossFit Games. In conjunction with these documentaries three episodes from the *Road to the Games* mini-series on YouTube will be examined: *Road to the Games 16.09: Sigmundsdottir/Davidsdottir /Thorisdottir* (RtG1), *Road to the Games 17.07: Davidsdottir/Toomey/Sigmundsdottir/Briggs* (RtG2), and *Road to the Games Ep. 18.01: Annie, Sara & Katrin—Nordic Goddesses* (RtG3). These three episodes focus on athletes Sara Sigmundsdottir, Katrin Davidsdottir, and Annie Thorisdottir during the 2015, 2016 and the 2017 CrossFit Games and follow the women through their daily lives and preparations for the Games season. I chose to include these three episodes in my analysis as many of the interviews in these episodes seemed to be extended footage from interviews already seen in the documentaries, the women are shown in the same place wearing the same outfits seen in the first and third documentaries. Annie is not featured in any episode of the 2017 *Road to the Games* season and so (RtG2) was chosen because it featured Katrin and Sara along with Sam and Tia. While I watched all three seasons in their entirety, these three episodes were representative of the discourses surrounding the “Nordic Goddesses” Sara, Katrin, and Annie in the Games seasons that the documentaries focus on.

In my analysis of these documentaries and mini-series, I am focusing on not only the words that are spoken but also the context by which they are spoken. There are many contexts and tones that carry weight and meaning, which include: when a commentator or athlete is speaking, it is noteworthy if they are in the frame or if information is communicated through voice over; the tone set by the music playing is of importance; the ways in which the athletes are dressed; or what actions the athletes are doing while a voice over is happening (which can include emotion and body language). The many representations of CrossFit athletes through the

documentaries have potential to demonstrate some of the strategies used by the producers to construct a social narrative, which is consumed by viewers who are then encouraged to accept and internalize normative gender roles. The athletes being represented throughout the documentaries analyzed in this project are portrayed in limited ways, specifically through gender narratives, and their images are products of a social structure and then reproduce gendered social norms.

In my analysis of the documentaries and mini-series I first watched each film/episode of the *Fittest on Earth* and *Road to the Games* series. Then, I transcribed each documentary, and the three episodes. Each text was watched and analyzed after transcription for emerging themes and every time I watched the films I would code the notes and cross-reference previous notes to confirm that the emerging themes were across the texts. The following section is a summary of each text used in my project.

Text Overview: A Summary of the Documentaries and Episodes

Fittest on Earth: The Story of the 2015 Reebok CrossFit Games (FoE1)

The 2015 Games took place over four days and consisted of various events. This movie follows athletes Katrin Davidsdottir, Sara Sigmundsdottir, Annie Thorsdottir, Samantha (Sam) Briggs, Mat Fraser, and Ben Smith as they compete, live their lives, train, and reflect on their experiences during the CrossFit Games season. We are shown key figures throughout the documentaries, the first, a CrossFit Games analyst named Tommy Marquez, CrossFit Games host Rory Mckernan, and CrossFit Games general manager Justin Bergh. Dave Castro, the CrossFit Games Director, is introduced and he speaks to the unknowable nature of CrossFit. The general format consists of interviews cut back and forth with action shots of athletes during the

events. A great deal of this documentary is a back and forth between “on-field” and “off-field” footage of the athletes throughout their experiences at the Games. Each event is captured, and the athletes are given opportunities to reflect on or explain their experiences regarding each workout. In the last quarter of the documentary, a struggle for the top spots emerges; on the men’s side between Mat and Ben and on the women’s side between Katrin and Sara. Dave Castro announced Katrin as the fittest woman on earth, and Ben Smith as the male champion after a dramatic finish. At the end of the film, Mat and Sara reflect on being even more inspired for the next season. Ben and Katrin are celebrated for their hard work that lead to them winning the Games.

Fittest on Earth: A Decade of Fitness (2017) (FoE2)

The 2016 Reebok CrossFit Games were held over five days and consisted of 15 events. This documentary begins with a dramatic recap of the origins of the Games on a California ranch and how a decade later the 2016 Games had become a global phenomenon. We are introduced to Mat, Ben, Katrin, and Sara and they are all shown training. Rory, Pat, and Justin lead the viewers through a segment that connects CrossFit to the average “box” and the average CrossFitter. Katrin is also featured designing her Reebok apparel and talking about what it's like working with Reebok and how she now gets more attention and is now like a celebrity. Once the Games begin, the athletes are taken on a mystery trip to Dave Castro’s ranch that hosted the first Games. The athletes complete three events on the ranch that were repeat events from the first Games, and afterwards the athletes are brought back to the Games venue. Tia, Katrin, and Sara are all interviewed as potential champions and are highlighted throughout the various events, both on and off field. On the last day of competition, Tia sat in first place, Katrin second, and Sara was in third; and Mat was so far ahead that he could not lose unless he dropped out. Throughout the

events on Sunday a battle between Tia and Katrin is highlighted. Brent Fikowsky—a Lethbridge athlete—did very well and placed third, and Mat Fraser dominated the competition and won the title “Fittest man on Earth.” At the end of the film, Dave arrives to announce the women’s champion. It was determined that Katrin had won the Games. Tia was crushed to take second and was shown crying and hugging her fiancé for support since she felt like she let him down.

The Redeemed and the Dominant: Fittest on Earth (2018) (FoE3)

The 2017 Games consists of a four-day, 13 event, intense competition. Immediately in the introduction, a male announcer is dramatically heard over images of women ready to compete and he is questioning who the next fittest woman on earth will be. Footage of Australian athletes Tia and Kara in the last event is shown with dramatic voice-overs and intense music and then it cuts to a flashback from the year prior to footage of Tia placing second in the 2016 Games. Katrin is focused on as the first potential woman to win three championships, Sara and Tia are also highlighted as major contenders. Dave is shown at the “yarrow” (testing lab) through his process of creating the Games workouts and structure. This portion focuses on Dave and his processes, as well as non-games athletes testing out potential workouts and there are shots of Reebok and Rogue equipment. The coverage of the competition is in a similar format to the other documentaries; we see a great deal of the film interviewing athletes, showing competition footage, and following the featured athletes throughout their Games experience. On the last day of competition, Mat is so far ahead that he cannot lose unless he drops out, and Tia is leading over Kara by six points. We are brought back to the footage that was shown in the introduction and Tia is shown running out onto the field. Tia is keeping her eyes on Kara, while Annie is fighting for the event and is racing to beat Sara who is a couple of paces ahead. Annie just barely gets in ahead of Sara. The hype is on the fight between Tia and Kara and they come in to the

finish line and it is unclear on who won the event. Dave calls up Kara and Tia and announces that the winner is Australian, and it is Tia Clair Toomey. Tia hits the ground crying and then runs over to hug Shane (fiancé/coach). There is also a narrative of steroid use in CrossFit woven throughout this film, which follows Australian athlete Ricky Garard. He placed third overall in 2017 but it was found out months after the Games that he tested positive for two performance-enhancing drugs which resulted in him being banned from CrossFit events for four years.

16.09: Sigmundsdottir/Davidsdottir /Thorisdottir and Road to the Games (RtG1)

In this episode Sara, Katrin, and Annie are shown training, preparing food, and at home in Iceland. Sara is shown first reflecting on her history of “being a fat kid,” and she shows the audience her home, her bird, and her food habits. Annie is then introduced in her kitchen making breakfast with her boyfriend. The show jumps to Boston, to Katrin cooking her breakfast at her coach Ben’s house, and the audience is then shown a day in the life of Katrin’s training. This episode depicts the three women in various competition settings from the previous Games and Katrin is highlighted for winning the Games. Throughout this episode, Sara is very food motivated and talks about food more than almost anything else. She is also shown training and reflecting on her competitions.

17.07: Davidsdottir/Toomey/Sigmundsdottir/Briggs (RtG2)

We are introduced to Katrin Davidsdottir, Sara Sigmundsdottir, Tia Clair Toomey, and Sam Briggs. The introduction is composed of various action shots of each female athlete working out; their names are flashed on the screen, and dramatic music plays. Katrin is introduced first, where she is training in an upscale ocean house rental with her coach Ben and other athletes in Cape Cod. Sara is shown in Tennessee training under the mentorship of previous

four-time champ Rich Froning. Tia is training in San Diego with Josh Bridges and Sam is shown in Manchester training. Tia reflects on her experience placing second at the Games again and then talks about going to the Rio Olympics as a weightlifter. We then cut to Sara talking about her morning routine, how good baby food is and the types of training she does. Sam discusses weighing her food and how many calories a day she eats. Throughout the episode, we are shown various setting that all of the athletes are training in. After following each athlete through their life, and through their training, the episode wraps up with a segment of each of the women reflecting on their training and how badly they want to win the Games. These interviews are set over dramatic montages of them training, competing, and suffering through difficult workouts.

18.01: Annie, Sara & Katrin—Nordic Goddesses (RtG3)

“Nordic Goddesses” focuses on events after the last documentary and the Dottirs beginning the 2018 Games season. Beautiful landscape shots of Iceland are presented to the viewer and Sara takes the anonymous male interviewer to a waterfall. The episode cuts to flashbacks of Sara placing fourth in the 2017 Games and yet she was still disappointed that she didn’t make it onto the podium. Annie is introduced making the same breakfast, in the same kitchen, with her boyfriend again. She reflects on her third-place performance and how she is proud to show the world that she is there to compete. Katrin is back in Iceland after training abroad and she is happy to have six weeks back at home. Sara is interviewed in a car about food, body image, and CrossFit after they leave the waterfall. Annie is at her “box” with the tourists that we saw in the last documentary and then training with Katrin; it is made clear that the two of them have a history together through CrossFit and are good friends. Throughout the film the Dottirs are training, food prepping, strategizing, their daily lives, and Katrin, in particular, is very active on social media. The episode ends with all three women in various action shots, muscled

bodies visible, with voiceovers speaking to Icelandic work ethic and the Dottirs' drive to get better and win the Games.

Chapter Overview

This project adds to the existing literature on gender representation in sport and media by specifically looking at the discourses of gender in the media surrounding the CrossFit Games 2015-2017 seasons. My research examines some of the ways that gender stereotypes and problematic representations of gender as a dichotomy in sport are deployed through the CrossFit documentaries. Chapter Two focuses on narratives deployed featuring female athletes who outperform men and how the representations of the Dottirs work to (re)produce ideals surrounding a superior white heterosexual athlete and the complexities and contradictions of Nordic "ethnicity." Chapter Three analyzes the production of the "ideal" CrossFitter and the "ideal" body through a neoliberal focus.

Professional sport has traditionally valued male athletes and teams far more than female athletes as illustrated by an imbalance in salary, sports media coverage, sponsorships, and the discourse surrounding male superiority in athleticism (Messner, 1993). The CrossFit lifestyle is marketed to and consumed by the average "ideal" CrossFit participant and these documentaries (re)produce discourses surrounding the "ideal" CrossFitter. My analysis shows that the narratives surrounding the Dottirs produce an "ideal" woman participant, or self-made (wo)man, and are specifically understood through the production of Sara's athletic image. My research unpacks representations of CrossFit athletes and explores the ways in which CrossFit continues to deploy problematic gender and racialized narrative. CrossFit supposedly promotes an image of gender equality which may have the potential to break through some gender boundaries and limits in sport, particularly in relations to the concept that CrossFit women are "just as good as the guys."

However, these “progressive” outperformances exist within a problematic framework of neoliberalism that rewards productivity and punishes “idleness” and is limited to only some white women.

Chapter Two

The Dottirs: Superior Female Athletes and Heteronormativity

Introduction

Hegemonic gender order offers a framework for unpacking the intersection of marginalized groups that use existing systems to their advantage or develop a new system countering the hegemonic order by which they are able to benefit. Female CrossFit athletes have the potential to adopt and adapt hegemonic ideals and representations shown throughout social media sources surrounding the CrossFit Games and use these ideals to their advantage. Female athletes who embody a muscular, strong, and thus “traditionally” masculine bodies are benefiting from the CrossFit “ideal” body as the women of CrossFit are able to market themselves in a new light that has shifted away from the thin “sexy” model. Krane (2001) highlights the possible consequences of nonconformity to expected femininity including the threat of stereotypes, stigma, harassment, loss of opportunity in sport, and the possibility of becoming unmarketable. These are all potential determining factors in the ways that the female athletes navigate the balance between “masculine” athlete and “feminine” women.

It seems as if the appearance and gender performance of some female athletes affects their marketability more than their athletic success. This has potential consequences for athletes who may rely on sponsorships and need to comply with a marketable form of gender performance in order to be chosen to represent a brand. For example, first Reebok and then Nike targeted a female market through sport product advertisements. These early advertisements that marketed to women and girls focused on how “playing like a girl” is a positive thing. While these advertisements were progressive in bringing issues of gender representation in sport to popular culture, they were still problematic in that they helped only a select few (Heywood and

Dworkin, 2003). Through the seductive images of advertisements white, middle-class women could feel good about their purchases while unwittingly reinforcing the subordination of minority groups. In CrossFit, most of the high profile and more marketable athletes are white, conventionally attractive women. These women are endorsed by Reebok CrossFit and are seen in commercials that represent this capitalistic drive to make profits at the expense of others, especially those who are paid very little in overseas “sweatshops” to make the Reebok items they are endorsing. CrossFit uses marketing of their female athletes in a progressive and problematic way; the women of CrossFit seem to be respected and celebrated but there are limited representations of different femininities.

CrossFit women are exhibiting an arguably strong, “masculine” presence and appearance. While this may be interpreted as progressive and “gender-bending”, there are instances where “femininity” is being shown through makeup, clothing, poses, expressions of emotion, and reliance on men. For instance, in the opening scene of FoE3 Tia Clair Toomey—the winner of the women's individual CrossFit competition in 2017—is shown crying over her very close loss of a first place to Katrin Davidsdottir in 2016. The video depicts Tia crying and falling into her fiancé/coach’s arms while her voice is narrating over the video clip. The film moves on to Katrin and Mat Fraser (2016, 2017, and 2018 male champion) narrating themes of winning and triumph through hard work, over video images of them working out with barbells, handstand push-ups, rope climbs, and other physically strong movements. Tia goes on to win the 2018 Games, and perhaps this was part of the motivation to initially focus on her close loss to Katrin in the 2017 season. It is important to highlight that Tia is shown as emotionally distraught and is then seen going to her “man” for support. She is an incredibly strong athlete and embodies a muscular and potentially “gender-bending” presence and yet femininity is enforced by reminding the viewer

that she is a heterosexual female in a committed relationship with “female” emotions. To a certain extent, this enforced femininity and is used to preserve the gender order.

The process of developing what Schippers (2007) termed a “pariah femininity” to preserve the gender order is applicable to some of the gendering and gender performances seen throughout the CrossFit games. Despite Connell’s arguments against “hegemonic femininity,” Finley (2010) argues that hegemonic femininity is a useful concept for understanding the maintaining of gender order. This hegemonic femininity is not considered to be subordinate as the female athletes possess masculine traits, and thus are less inferior. These types of hybrid femininities are “pariah femininities” because they stretch the accepted gender roles and represent masculinity embodied by women. “Pariah femininities” can act in stereotypically masculine ways that can undermine masculine dominance, that is, until these women are “stigmatized and feminized” (Finley, 2010, p. 361). In her work, Finley looks at Roller Derby athletes and analyzes the ways they claim a “pariah” identity as well as subvert the gender order through alternative femininities and gender maneuvering. The standard of a derby girl is one that is clearly built in contrast to hegemonic femininity that they most often describe as the “girlie girl” (Finley, 2010, p. 378). While there is a subversive subculture that is challenging the hegemonic gender order, here Finley highlights that there are hierarchies within the female athletes’ identities and relations with other women. This is counter to the notion that women cannot embody a “hegemonic femininity” and that there is only an “emphasized femininity” in direct relation to “hegemonic masculinity.”

Just as Good as the Guys

In organized sport the domination by, and “natural” superiority of men, is perpetuated. For instance, Messner argues, “organized sport has been a crucial arena of struggle over basic social conceptions of masculinity and femininity, and as such has become a fundamental arena of ideological contest in terms of power relations between men and women” (2007, p. 34). It is here that CrossFit offers a slightly different narrative. Although there are still similar portrayals of able, white, muscled male bodies, which offer the male viewer a dominant presence to identify with, there is also the female CrossFitter who embodies a powerful, dominant, white, and muscled physique. However, bodybuilders have been demonstrated to both problematize and complement the gender binary through a muscular appearance (Johnston, 2010). Additionally, women are accepted as muscular within dominant discourses, as long as it is not considered excessive. So, muscular bodies reside in a gender system, which equates muscularity with masculinity and masculinity as powerful (Halberstam, 1998; James & Gill, 2017). Also, through the promotion of discourses surrounding strength and empowered femininity (“strong is the new skinny”), CrossFit has been found to (re)produce problematic ideals surrounding femininity, and the portrayal of woman’s bodies as sexual objects which then limits alternative portrayals of gender (Washington and Economides, 2016). James and Gill (2017) did not find examples of what Schippers (2007) defines as pariah femininity in CrossFit discourses, which embodies masculinity in a way that is seen as disruptive to traditional gender ideologies, instead, they argue that CrossFit offers an “alternative femininity” (Finley, 2010). Alternative femininities are seen as a hybrid femininity that embraces aspects of masculinity without disrupting or threatening hegemonic masculine ideals. However, my analysis of the documentaries demonstrates instances where female CrossFitters embody muscularity, strength, and dominance that challenges some representations of gender performances.

In FoE3 the camera pans over the warm up area and the audience is shown most of the athletes sprawled across the floor under a “rig” (the jungle gym like apparatuses that CrossFit athletes do gymnastics movements on). We see about equal numbers of men and women in this shot. Each and every athlete shown is white. As the camera shifts from various close ups of popular athletes—such as Sarah, Katrin, and Tia—we hear Rory’s voice over speaking to the serious nature of the athletes in the warm up area and how the athletes “are starting to get their head wrapped around exactly what it is that they need to do.” We are shown an interaction with Tia and her fiancé/coach, Shane, which ends in them kissing and Shane talking about how Tia feels. There is dramatic music as the camera pans over athletes getting ready for a swim event and the camera pauses on an interaction between Kara Webb and Sara in the waiting area,

Kara: Everyone has no faith in me. They think I’m gonna do something weird.

Although Sara and I did just go into the men’s toilet.

Sara: Girls are just as good as guys. They can use the bathroom too.

Sara directly verbalized here a theme that is present in the documentary series; the female CrossFit athletes are portrayed to be just as good as the male athletes. Female athletes are shown lifting what seems to be impossibly heavy weights as is shown when Pat Sherwood is heard reflecting on a snatch event in FoE3: “the women are so ridiculously capable and fit and strong and powerful, that I don’t think most people—I don’t think most people get it. It just goes back to the whole thing—they make it look too easy.” Male commentators, such as Pat, are heard and shown throughout the series interpreting the female athletes’ performances.

In the FoE2 Pat is shown in an interview where he is talking about Kara in the squat clean ladder event, athletes had to lift increasingly heavy barbells in a row and the winner completed all the lifts the fastest. He says, “I couldn’t keep up with her and that thing [the squat ladder

event], same weights.” We are shown action shots of Kara lifting heavy weights, the camera focuses on her face as she shows extreme physical exertion. “And I don’t know if you think you could, but I’m here to tell you, you can’t. Not even close.” The footage cuts back and forth to Pat speaking to, almost challenging, the camera and Kara lifting. “We’ll set it up after this. And then we’ll play it on a monitor and you can try and race her on the monitor. It ain’t gonna go well.” Sean Woodland is then heard announcing Kara winning the event over footage of Kara crossing the finish line. Pat challenging the camera, or the viewer, to go up against Kara shows an appreciation for her strength, power, and superiority. Pat makes it clear that he would not be able to beat her, and as he is a male “calling out the viewer” and declaring they also would not be as good as her. I read this as Pat challenging an “average” male viewer. Here, Pat is implying that Kara is just as good, if not better, than the average man.

The women of the CrossFit Games are featured just as much, if not, more than the men; this is through the live streaming of the Games events, commentators such as Rory, Pat, Tommy, and Sean (all introduced in Chapter One), and unidentifiable male voices, all of which focus on the female athletes’ performances. The teams are comprised of two women and two men who compete together, also, the women make the same amount of prize money as the men and are potentially offered Reebok and Rogue sponsorships. Miller, McKay, and Martin speak to how the top 20 women in tennis make similar figures to the men but outside that the salary drops drastically and women make as little as half as that of the male tennis players and that,

a debt is owed to the women's movement, which reemerged alongside the tennis rage of the seventies. Feminism's social agonism had its tennis equivalent in the match arranged between former Wimbledon champion and latter-day hustler Bobby Riggs and King, then at the top of the women's game. King's activism not

only advocated but was propelled by the burgeoning presence of women in the workforce and the more general labor of women's bodies. (1999, p. 224)

King represented a class and gender revolution to many fans of tennis, however, the expanding participation of women in tennis (labour) was in fact generating a great deal of value to tennis, which there was no transparency about. Rivalries between dominant women players generated interest and excitement in tennis and “this concentration of talent has produced sustained rivalries of the sort that build cultural investment and audience. In the strictest calculus of political economy, women's expanded labor time was generating more value” (1999, p. 224). While, feminist “inclusion” into the world, and pay, of tennis may have seemed to be moving in a progressive direction, this ultimately supported capitalist exploitation rather than female empowerment. CrossFit may pay the women of CrossFit comparably to the men, however, as a corporation celebrating, promoting, and profiting off the discursive production of these strong women who outperform the men. I question the practice of exploitation at the expense of the labour of female CrossFit athletes.

In sport, seemingly benign factors are important in relation to the representation of women. In traditional sports, male athletes, and male events, are almost exclusively shown on popular sport television channels. Male athletes are paid far more on average than women in the same sport, and women’s bodies are often the focus rather than their performances (Clark and Clark, 1982; Messner, 2007). Commentators have a history of covering women’s sports in a manner that is belittling because “the extreme potentialities of the male body” is the dominant framework that is used to determine what is exceptional and presentations of women’s athletic performances are a likely way of “solidifying the ideological hegemony of male superiority,” as the commentators essentially compare the female athletes to the standards and expectations of a

male athlete's performance (Messner, 1999, p. 42). As women compete in sports that have been male made, and defined, commentators are then able to use male statistics as ways to "objectively" measure the performance of women (Messner, 1999). Women in tennis are often depicted in ways that belittle their performance by comparing their games and shots to me, for instance, how women who perform a top spin (which was "traditionally" assumed to be a man's power move) (Miller et al., 1999). Also, commentators will comment on women's bodies, "broadcast announcers, often former professionals, remark upon the appearance of women's bodies in a manner that has only the vaguest equivalent in terms of men's 'fitness'" (Miller et al., 1999, p. 226). I argue that the representation of CrossFit women by commentators both reproduces these issues while simultaneously challenging hegemonic ideals surrounding male superiority as the women of CrossFit have dominated in the same events as men, and sometimes outperformed male athletes. Yes, men are expected to lift more than women in the sport, but women are compared to other women in these events and not to the expected "extreme potentialities of the male body;" thus, the women of CrossFit are held to their own standards while excelling at traditionally masculine movements, and skills (Messner, 1999, p. 42). The success of CrossFit women challenges the hegemonic ideals of the "superior" male athlete, while simultaneously reproducing the assumption that men are stronger than women.

While this seems to be a transgressive representation of gender in sport, it is important to recognize that most of the athletes in the documentaries, and all of the athletes interviewed, were white. It is crucial to understand that the representations of the athletes in CrossFit seem to reproduce limited types of femininities and masculinities. In this section I wish to highlight that a theme has emerged across all three films, which seems to be unique in comparison to conventional organized sport. This is the emergent idea that the women of CrossFit are just as

good as the men. The following excerpts are focusing on Sam Briggs, a female CrossFit athlete who has been competing at the Games since 2010 and won the title of “Fittest Woman on Earth” in 2013. During a scene from FoE1, the audience hears various, unidentified male voice commenting on Sam Briggs which is heard over of footage of Sam and other athletes completing the work out Murph,

Male commentator: The woman’s unreal, she [Sam Briggs] blew the field out of the water in the women’s division. She should have done that next to the men and she probably had a chance of beating the top man in that division.

Male commentator 2: Sam will take Murph. She would have taken second in the men’s division with that time.

Second Male: Wow!

Here, Sam is being compared to the male athletes and her performance is deemed to be just as good as the guys, if not better. In the exchange there is the underlying assumption that men are “naturally” superior, and Sam’s performance is considered noteworthy only because she seems to challenge these assumptions. The excitement these commentators show towards Sam’s dominant performance may seem progressive in highlighting a woman who is just as good, or better, than the guys. Rather, I argue, what these comments do is support the process of naturalization of male superior athleticism by highlighting her as an outlier, by making “a big deal” out of her performance in relation to the men these comments reproduce expectations that men “should” be better than women at sports and when someone challenges these expectations it is considered to be abnormal. And as such, Sam may offer an alternative form of femininity that does work to challenge the constructed ideas surrounding “dominant” men and “weak” women,

her performance has been framed in a way that still works to reproduce ideas of male superiority in sport as she is strategically positioned as being abnormal or even unique. I argue that Sam is uniquely represented in these films, she is shown to have the ability to dominate over the men, however, she is still carefully represented in a way that portrays her to be an outsider, or an uncommon occurrence; her actions show dominance and yet the portrayal of her achievements resituate her narrative in the dominant ideology that men are inherently “better” than women.

Sam is well known in the CrossFit community for doing well on endurance-based events and has been known to challenge assumptions surrounding the superior male athlete. She is considered dominant over the male athletes in this context and is widely respected for her performance. Arguably, this shows a potential example of hegemonic femininity, or even “pariah femininity,” based primarily on her individual achievements and ability to outperform them men. She is even shown bantering with male athletes in a way that emasculates them. Within the documentaries, Sam is presented as dominating over others, or in other words, embodying hegemonic male attributes. As hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to the subordination of others (Connell, 1987). In the following excerpt from FoE2, we can appreciate how Sam’s performance dominated over the other male athletes,

Pat: Here’s what I like about Sam Briggs. She’s running, there’s not a female in sight. She could walk it in. Brent Fikowski is about 10 or 15 feet in front of Sam Briggs, and solely to establish dominance, Sam Briggs dusts Brent Fikowski just to say, ‘Welcome aboard, rookie, this is my event.’

Male commentator: Not necessary to do at all, that’s just how Sam Briggs rolls, and I love it.

[the film then shows male athletes having a conversation about Sam in the recovery area after the event]

Jacob Hepner: Sam Briggs beat me in the run.

Male voice: Did she beat you on the run?

Jacob Hepner: Yea, I was the first dude she beat.

Brent Fikowski: [bleep] I know she was.

Jacob Hepner: She was right behind you. I was like, oh, Briggs—Yeah. How close were you to Brent?

Sam: I took him on the last corner. [Sam joins the conversation and is smiling confidently over the two guys bugging each other]

Jacob: I'm not the first dude!

Brent Fikowski: Yeah, no, I, uh... I don't feel good.

Jacob Hepner: So you took fourth overall, I took fifth overall? Oh, yeah, 'cause of her.

The male athletes here seem to be upset that Sam had beaten them in the event and further, they also appear to be mocking each other as if they are somehow less of an athlete, or man, because Sam outperformed them. This theme is found throughout all three documentaries, for example, in FoE3, Brent is shown speaking about the time Sam beat him in regard to an event where his position was threatened, again, by female athletes,

So, every now and again, I'd look back, and just wanted to make sure the lead was about the same. I didn't have a lot of energy left in my legs. And then I saw a female. I couldn't tell who it was, 'cause it was a brief glance. And I thought, 'Oh, no, that's definitely Sam Briggs.' She passed me the year prior, in the first

event of the year, the run. And so I continued on, just running at my pace, thinking, if she passes you again, she passes you again. [at this point the go to flashback footage from the year prior of Sam winning the even and catching up to, and passing, Brent]

The commentators and male athletes are shown celebrating and talking about how female CrossFit athletes are sometimes known for doing better than the guys and that they are portrayed throughout the films performing the same athletic movements as the men. Sara Sigmundsdottir also is presented as better than the guys in a scene from RtG2. Sara is training with one of the male teen athletes and he is asked about what it is like to work out with a girl. The young man said “it’s stressful, hard...I mean anyone doesn’t want to be beat by a girl.” Sara laughs and talks about how the guys don’t want her to work out with them and she turns to the camera and states, “the guys, they never want me to do the same thing as them...So, I’m going to say this on camera, I’ve beaten Mat at strict handstand push-ups and GHD sit ups,” and then smiles and makes a hand pumping motion of celebration. However, we still see the reproduction of norms surrounding the expectation that a male is the “naturally” superior athlete, even when the message of “girls are just as good as the guys” is portrayed. While the women of CrossFit are portrayed in a way that constructs a narrative of their superiority as athletes, there are also strategies deployed that reinforce heteronormative ideals.

Heteronormativity

Foucault (1978) questioned the social assumptions of heteronormativity in his writings concerning discourses surrounding “regimes of truth” which reinforced and construct ideologies and knowledge about how we come to understand heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Compulsory heterosexuality is a societal norm, leading to the assumption that the majority of

sexual couplings or relationships are with the opposite sex, or gender, and are then seen as heterosexual. In part, heteronormativity can be read as the inherent assumption that most people are heterosexual (Carroll, 2012; Stokes, 2005); which then contributes to the dominant understanding surrounding social, cultural, economic, and political organizations which then govern (re)productions of discourses and ideologies surrounding sex and gender which influences the construction of “normal” heterosexuality in society (Warner, 1991; Butler, 2002) However, examining the ways heterosexual identities are produced, and the subsequent gendered effects, is invaluable in mapping and understanding heteronormativity. Here it is important to stress that heteronormativity and heterosexuality are not synonyms. Feminist scholarship has situated heteronormativity in the analysis of intersectionality and is understood to be important in discussions of power relations and domination (Ward & Schneider, 2009). This focus has helped to cultivate understandings of the ways relationships have evolved between heteronormativity, the regulation of sexualized bodies, and white normativity (Collins 2004; Ferguson 2004; Somerville 2000); “and of the ways normative sexual hierarchies structure global processes such as migration, tourism, sex work, and other forms of labor” (Ward & Schneider, 2009, p. 434). Structures that work to normalize daily, ritualistic acts of labour that produce gendered and heterosexual existences are consistently found throughout the *Fittest on Earth* documentaries.

Athletes are shown to be in heterosexual partnerships enacting a particular gendered life, such as participating in domestic labour and discussing plans for marriage. This heterosexual lifestyle is built on particular norms which guide how individuals choose to act and monitor themselves. It is a great deal of work that the individual must invest in and navigate in order to produce and reproduce these heteronormative expectations. These “heterosexual and homosexual norms are constituted not only by notions about gender and ‘object choice’ but also by a complex

matrix of ideas about age, racialized and gendered bodies, romantic love, middle class strivings, nationalist values, and cross-cultural desires” (Ward & Scheider, 2009, p. 435).

Heteronormativity plays a role in shaping the production of individual identities and the ways that relationships are enacted and understood. In the documentaries the viewer is presented with the daily lives of the Dottirs and the ways that they are defined as beautiful, available, and heterosexual women.

The Sweetheart, Beautiful, and Heterosexual Woman of CrossFit

The Dottirs, as well as other female CrossFit athletes, are portrayed in the films within a heteronormative framework, particularly through the narratives constructed throughout the documentaries that are off-field. Tia Clair Toomey, in particular, is framed as a woman who will be marrying her coach/fiancé. Almost every female athlete featured in the documentaries and mini-series is portrayed in a way that centers her life, or athletic career around a man. Also, the women of CrossFit are highlighted for being beautiful and feminine in various off-field settings, which situates them as still being desirable to the male gaze.

In FoE2 the athletes completed three events on the ranch that were repeated events from the first Games, and after a seven-kilometer trail run the women are shown covered in mud and dirt. All of the athletes had just completed the run through incredibly steep, dusty Californian hills, when the viewer is shown footage of the athletes on the run the dust is so thick it looks like smoke. Rory Mckernan says, “seeing some of the women of the CrossFit Games, who are sweethearts and beautiful women...just with like dirt mustaches? [laughs] and like dirt beards, you know, and they didn’t know when they were having their interviews done.” At this time most of the female athletes are shown around the ranch in sports bras and booty shorts, some

being interviewed and some just sitting around, and they are all covered in dirt. Sara was shown in a later interview addressing this incident and is apparently concerned with how she looked at the time, “oh my gosh have I been looking like this the whole time?! Like mud everywhere, like between my teeth and everything.” Rory is shown saying “you were like ‘it’s fine’ and then he dramatically pulls back from the camera and puts his hands up exclaiming “OH!” to indicate how bad the mud looked. The men and the women were covered in mud, and yet, as the camera pans around the athlete’s area we are shown dirty woman after woman, smiling with dirt mustaches or mud on their teeth (Annie, Katrin, Camille Leblanc-Bazinet, Brooke Wells), and Katrin is seen talking about sliding on her butt down the hill and the camera pans to show her dirty butt and legs.

Muscular, athletic female bodies are celebrated within the CrossFit movement and yet there seems to be a simultaneous push to embody stereotypically feminine traits among female CrossFit athletes. These athletes have large, muscular bodies that they are more than willing to expose when completing various feats of strength. Despite these female athletes being depicted as “better than the guys” we see these same athletes wearing overly feminine clothing, makeup, long blond hair, and other markers of emphasized femininity outside of competition. For example, in FoE3 Katrin is shown in a closeup and she is wearing only a sports bra, her muscled shoulders are obvious, and she has her fingernails to the camera and we can see slightly pink sparkly polish. “When in doubt, sparkle. Anything, and it doesn't just apply to nails. [Turns her hands around to look at her nails] It’s eye shadow. It’s headbands. Leotards. [male voice off camera, an athlete maybe, says “especially leotards” and Katrin looks and points at him] “Special leotards.” The scene cuts to a slightly different angle and Katrin grabs her ear “I used to always wear sparkly earrings, but my grandma always wore pearls. So I changed, I wear pearls now.”

Also, athletes who comply with the prescribed feminine appearance have found great success, garnering featured coverage within the documentaries and as a result, Reebok or Rogue sponsorships, i.e. Katrin and her Reebok sponsorship discussed in Chapter three.

In the late 1990s, there was a potential shift in beauty ideals throughout the celebration of female athletic bodies. Miller et. al. speculated as to whether the ideal of modern “beauty for beauty's sake” was dissipating as athletes such as Serna Williams and Anna Kournikova were gracing covers of fashion magazine in 1998 (1999, p. 225). However, Anna Kournikova was celebrated and adored by the media for being young, beautiful, and sexually elusive. For example, this excerpt that describes Kournikova in the Australian Open:

If all the world's a stage, Anna Kournikova wants to be the main act. Make that the only act. Never mind that she's only 16 and never been kissed. This walking, talking, Russian-born Barbie look-alike has completed the learning curve... [she] reduces men aged 15 to 50 to gibbering idiots and . . . tells ball boys who want to take her out that they can't afford her. (Evans 1998, as cited in Miller et al. 1999, p. 226)

These “shifts” in public perception of what is beautiful were then trivial at best. Media depictions of female athletes re-center the narrative of their bodies on the appearance and “sexiness” that they embody as desirable women. Examples of this phenomena can be found throughout the documentaries, much like the “sweethearts and beautiful [CrossFit] woman” covered in mud.

Not only are the women of CrossFit beautiful but they are depicted as being heterosexual. There are two apparent strategies used to define the Dottirs in relation to heteronormative relationships. First, she will be identified as someone’s wife or girlfriend, or her partner as

boyfriend or husband. Second, her athletic success is connected to a male coach, friend, or partner who has somehow influence or affected her performance and is often framed as the “expert.”

Partway through a dinner scene in the RtG3 or “Nordic Goddesses” episode, Frederik and Annie are shown in their home with Katrin. Fredrik is at the stove top and cooking fajitas explaining how they cook them every other day because “if I gotta get Annie to eat. I gotta wrap it up in something” and Annie is seen laughing behind him. There is an interaction between the two of them, standing next to each other at the counter preparing food, elbows brushing each other, and bantering about who is the “better chef.” This scene works to establish that Annie and Fredrik are in a domestic partnership and Fredrik helps to take care of her as an athlete. We hear Annie’s voice over and then we cut to an interview segment where Annie is asked to define her relationship with Frederik:

Annie: I would say that me and Frederik are training partners and I would say Frederik is my hands-on coach as well. [*Something is asked off camera that is not shown and she responds*] Boyfriend [*laughing*] We’ve been together since five, six years something like that. I don’t know how it works because we’re together like 24/7 which is pretty crazy. Like we don’t always agree with everything but we work really well together.

In this scene, we are made aware that Annie is in a heterosexual relationship with a white man and together they participate in domestic labour like cooking and hosting guests. Sara Sigmundsdottir is often portrayed as more independent and is reliant on herself for her coaching and athletic decisions; she is shown in a type of mentor relationship with Rich Froning but he

was very careful to say he was not her coach and was more of a training partner. There is a poignant interview with Sara in RtG3, after she is shown talking in a car about her cup of buckwheat flakes and addressing her current style of eating, there is then a cut scene and the following interaction is shown with her in the same seat in the car:

Sara: Oh my god, I don't know what happened. It's just like, I think when I was like starting—like when I was ten it was like getting boobs for the first time. And everything, like I lost all my self-esteem and then.

Male Interviewer: because of boobs?

Sara: Yeah, then I developed earlier and I was like—I was so embarrassed and I was like lost a lot of self-esteem then, and then I think like, when I was in ninth grade, or when I was thirteen fourteen I met a new group of girls that I started hanging out with and then I got my self-esteem back. And then the best friend that I always hanging out with there, she met a guy and I had nothing else to do. So, why not try to lose weight? *[both laugh]*

Yea, I had a goal to get a boyfriend because I was so bored. *[laughs]*

In this interaction Sara speaks to her experiences as a youth and how her feelings surrounding food, body image, weight, and puberty affected her self-image and sense of self-worth; she finds a group of young women who help her overcome her challenges and yet still finds herself in a position where she seeks out the attention of a boyfriend for validation. This interview frames Sara as a vulnerable white woman who “needed” a boyfriend to be valuable and have something to do. Both of these examples highlight strategies that reinforce the heterosexuality of Annie and Sara, they comply with the “good life fantasy” where “normative kinship structures, property ownership, self-realization, and domesticity” (Dryden & Lenon, 2015, p. 6; also see Berlant,

2011). Despite their presentation on-field as transgressive towards hegemonic ideals surrounding femininity, their actions comply with expected heteronormative structures and so they are accepted as “normal” social subjects.

Katrin Davidsdottir won the Games in 2015 and 2016 and as the “Fittest on Earth” champion is highly featured in the three documentaries and mini-series. She is shown as a very positive, smiling, fun loving, social media using, conventionally feminine woman. While her narrative is not constructed around her partner, she does have a male coach who is interviewed often as an “expert” in her athletic endeavors and success. Ben Bergeron is shown to be Katrin’s coach in all three documentaries and is regularly interviewed and asked about Katrin, with his voice often the voice-over to her action and training shots. The deployment of the strategy that uses her male, white, coach as a figure of authority over her is one of the methods used that grounds Katrin’s story in a heteronormative. In *RtG2* Katrin is shown staying with Ben and his family at an upscale home in Cape Cod to train away from Iceland. We see shots of her swimming in the ocean, cooking with another athlete (Brooke Wells), eating outside with Ben and his family and reflecting on how “amazing” it is working with Ben and how the “Bergeron family is my [Katrin’s] family.” Earlier in the film the viewer is presented with a scene where Katrin is in a bikini on a lawn with Ben and his family jumping through the sprinkler, we hear a male voice asking Katrin wrapped in a towel, “are you their aunt?” in regard to Ben’s children and she replies “no, I’m their sister.” Here Katrin is reluctant to be placed in an authoritative, parental role. Katrin is not openly participating in a conventional, heteronormative lifestyle as she lives alone or rooms with her coach or volunteers as she travels for her training. Unlike the representation of Sara and Annie, Katrin subtly demonstrates resistance to a heteronormative understanding of how a young white woman “should” live her life. However, the narrative

situates her in an authoritative coach/mentor/fatherly relationship with Ben Bergeron that re-centers her in a heteronormative existence participating in the “good life” via her coach.

Not only is there a focus on the way’s that the Dottirs comply with a heteronormative lifestyle, but there is a lack of coverage of athletes who are openly gay, a marked silence or careful avoidance in CrossFit media. As Katherine Schweighofer states, “though some of its early CrossFit Games champions in the women’s division were out about their lesbianism, the organization’s media coverage carefully avoids discussion of athlete sexuality and continues to promote highly gendered workout apparel and heterosexist culture” (2016, p. 32). Samantha Briggs is an openly gay woman and has been candid about her partnerships in interviews up until 2011, in an interview titled “The Woman behind Sam Briggs: Jo Cartwright.” In RtG2, Sam is not shown to be in a partnership, even though she is married, instead, her athletics and the ways she achieves a “balanced lifestyle” are highlighted. Moral panics associated with lesbians in sport “recruiting” heterosexual young women has left many lesbian athletes “closeted” for fear of losing out on potential sponsorships (Miller et. al. 1999). Sport is considered “a place to look for sexual community, just as it is a site for sexual fantasy — here is the body on display, asking for evaluation and projection, and sold as such” and CrossFit is selling a heterosexual fantasy that does not include lesbians (Miller et. al., 1999, p. 223). This discursive absence speaks volumes and limits the transgressive potential of women, thus reinforcing heteronormativity through discursive silences.

New Transgender Policy

Many athletes who compete at the Games are openly gay or queer, though one would only become aware of this through their personal social media accounts. Recently, the CrossFit

Games and CrossFit HQ have created new policies and procedures and they now include a new Transgender athlete policy, which will affect trans athletes who wish to compete in the Open or at the Games. The United States has been resistant to gay marriage, adoption, and military personnel and “we can also say that the United States has investments in being exceptionally heteronormative even as it claims to be exceptionally tolerant of (homosexual) difference” (Puar, 2007, p. 10). While much of the political rhetoric in the United States has claimed to be tolerant of different genders and sexualities, this has most definitely not been the case in sport, especially for trans athletes. When the new transgender policy in “The 2019 Games season Rulebook” (see appendix) was announced there were many social media posts announcing that athletes could compete according to the gender they identify with. Historically, gender non-conforming, trans, and intersexed athletes have faced many barriers in competing in professional and Olympic sports. For example, in April of 2019, Castor Semenya lost her court case against the IAAF where she challenged their rules regarding testosterone levels in female athletes. Castor was previously identified as an intersexed athlete with higher than average testosterone levels and she was banned from competition. She was barred from competing based off the argument that this discrimination was considered reasonable in order to protect the “integrity of female athletics” (Dunbar, 2019, para. 2). Castor will now have to take medication to suppress her natural testosterone levels if she wants to continue competing in the 800 m. At first, I was hopeful that the new CrossFit trans policy would be revolutionary regarding trans athletes in the broader sporting environment, as there has been a great deal of discrimination with trans and gender non-conforming athletes in the Olympics in recent years. However, the CrossFit trans policy reproduces social anxieties surrounding the protection of female athletes from the “superior” male athlete and how the male to female trans individuals pose a “threat” to female athletes.

A trans athlete must show that “their gender in their everyday life matches their registration gender and then show their civil documents with their registration gender identified. (e.g., state ID or driver's license)” in order to participate in the Games process (CrossFit, 2019, p. 21). For a female to male trans individual, in that this is all they must do in order to compete, as long as they do not change their gender identity for four years after. The process is far more complicated for a male to female trans individual, they “must demonstrate that their total testosterone level in serum has been below 10 nmol/L for at least 12 months prior to their first CrossFit competition.” Those who may take longer than 12 months would need to be evaluated on a “confidential case-by-case evaluation by CrossFit, considering whether or not 12 months is a sufficient length of time to minimize any advantage in women’s competition” and their testosterone must remain at these levels for the competition season (CrossFit, 2019, p. 22). There is still the potential that a male to female individual could be denied as their file “will be reviewed by CrossFit, which shall determine, in its sole discretion, whether the athlete will be allowed to participate as a female” and they reserve the right to additional serum testing and could suspend an athlete for 12 months (CrossFit, 2019, p. 22). There is an exception to the testosterone level rules if an athlete in the female category “satisfactorily demonstrate to CrossFit that they have a genetic condition that affects the bioavailability of their serum testosterone, such as hyperandrogenism (e.g., PCOS in rare cases), androgen insensitivity syndrome or 5-alpha reductase deficiency (CrossFit, 2019, p. 22).

The policy begins with the statement, “CrossFit is committed to ensuring that all CrossFit athletes have equal access and opportunities to participate in CrossFit events in a manner that is fair to all competitors while preserving the integrity of the sport” (CrossFit, 2019, p. 21). I would like to highlight the language used here, “equal access and opportunities” suggests that the policy

will, in fact, allow for equal access regardless of gender and yet there is the immediate shift in the words “fair to all” suggesting that if some people, implying here male to female individuals, are allowed into the female category then it would be unfair and then compromise “the integrity of the sport.” As the policy is starkly different for a male to female individual than a female to male, by preserving the “fairness” of a female category they are “protecting” the female athletes from the “superior” male athlete. Not only is this enforcing the myth of a superior male athlete, but it is devaluing trans women as women, as they are still being judged as men and must prove their femaleness. While CrossFit pushes the rhetoric that “girls are just as good as the guys” throughout the films, the narrative surrounding the trans policies further complicates any “progressive” message that would be disruptive to the gender order.

Samantha Briggs, as discussed earlier, has acted in traditional masculine ways that may be perceived on an individual level as subversive. However, this potential example of a “pariah” femininity is subverted by the system that represents her. Those representational practices that reposition her as an anomaly work to undo the alternative representation of a female athlete. Throughout the texts, the hegemonic gender order is reclaimed through the representation of Sam, regardless of her individual actions, which then does not disrupt our traditional understanding that men are “better” or “stronger” than women.

There seems to be a preference given to which female athletes are celebrated over others, particularly in regard to heterosexual female athletes. Oddly, while we find progressive notions of “femininity” in CrossFit narratives, we also find a celebration of “conventional” heterosexual values. In addition, the representation of women’s’ bodies in CrossFit seems to differ in the on-field and off-field performances of femininity. There is an interesting juxtaposition in the ways in which media outlets both challenge hegemonic masculinity through representations of

women's bodies while simultaneously reproducing hegemonic feminine ideals off the field of sport including depictions of whiteness and more specifically a white Nordic ethnicity. All three of the Dottirs are visibly white, each of these women is very blonde, blue eyed, fair skinned and conventionally attractive. And they are often situated in discourses surrounding their non-Anglo identities as the Dottirs are all from Iceland, which makes them "Nordic Goddesses," thus made visible as white Nordic identities.

"Nordic Goddesses:" Fetishizing non-Anglo White Athletes

Throughout the *Fittest on Earth* documentaries, the Dottirs are heavily featured and interestingly receive more coverage than all male athletes, with the exception of Mat Fraser. All three of these women are shown in many contexts throughout the films. For example, they are shown working out and competing, are interviewed individually, and depicted behind the scenes of the competition, or off-field. There are few athletes of colour featured in the series; white athletes, by default, seem to be "the Fittest on Earth," a title that is often accompanied by celebrity status and thus could contribute to the prevalence of a dominant, powerful, white athlete.

Part way through the FoE2 we are presented with a narrative concerning Sara, she is in a dark hallway talking about failed reps in the squat clean ladder event and she seems frustrated as she states, "I never fail squat cleans. I don't know what's happening. I have to bring it for DT. [male voice asks if she is excited about DT off camera] I am, I'm very excited." The shot cuts to a banner on screen [Two weeks earlier in Stockton, CA] overtop a long railroad track going into the distant farmland. "My coach decided that we should go to Stockton for training camp before the Games." We hear Sara's voice as she walks into a farmyard and talks to some chickens, "they think we're giving them food. It's like a small farm or something" as she walks through a

farmyard. The view changes and we see a shot of Sara and four unidentified men walking on what looks like a small plane runway near some industrial buildings, other than that there is nothing around, Sara continues, “and walking distance from the gym. It was just awesome. It was so quiet.” Sara bends down to pick up chalk from a white plastic bucket. She is wearing a white Nike sports bra; her hair is bleached so blonde that it looks white against the bright blue sky. “It’s warmer than in L.A. Yea, no distractions.” The shot cuts to her in a black shirt in an interview setting elsewhere, the place where her “narration” voice is coming from. We cut back again to the bare cement runway with the introduction of bass-heavy dramatic music and we see a lonely barbell loaded with a plate per side and Sara’s white ankle is shown walking up to the bar. Her hand reaches down, her thumb is covered in white tape, her palm is covered in white chalk, and we see her palm wrap around the bar. As she begins to lift the bar the camera cuts to a new angle, out in front to see her perform the lift, after she has shrugged the bar up, and it is about to land in her front rack, the camera changes again to catch the dramatic shot of the barbell landing on her suntanned chest and white sports bra. The camera continually moves around her to catch every angle as she moves the barbell over and over again, she drives the barbell overhead with a look of intensity to her face. She drops the barbell to the ground and the music stops, there is silence other than the sounds of the barbell landing and her suffering. She yells in pain, re-tightens her weight belt and the sound of the Velcro is striking in the new silence. We hear her coach starting to yell at her “No breaks! Back to the bar, let's go!” Sara is huffing and puffing, she whimpers as it seems like she is almost crying with the discomfort. Her coach keeps yelling at her “Back to the bar, let's go! [yells in a different language] Back to the bar! [yells in a different language] Sara manages to lift the barbell again and screams as she drops it. “Come again! Fight to the end, Sara!” She readjusts her belt again and she whimper/screams and walks

back up to the bar, the camera focuses on her hand gripping the barbell again, she lifts the barbell and moves it through a few more hang cleans with a new look of determination, fiercely yelling her way through each rep, after she drops it from overhead again her coach yells “Come on! Go, go, go, go! Let’s go!” And Sara continues to lift while yelling some more “Let’s go! Come on!” As she finishes the work-out we get a glimpse of two men on the side watching her train, she rips off her weight belt and stumbles away and the camera follows her, focusing on her muscled back and shoulders. She bends over, huffing and puffing, sweat is dripping off her face, she takes a few big breaths to compose herself and stands back up. The shot cuts back to her at the Games with the reintroduction of music.

This dramatic portrayal of Sara is shown in totality in the FoE2, however, “flashbacks” to Sara suffering in that wide-open field are shown in the episode RtG2 and FoE3. In this segment, Sara’s white hair and tanned skin stand out against the blue sky and her white sports bra is striking next to her sun-kissed chest. She is lifting incredible weight on the barbell; her muscles are obvious, and she is an arresting figure. The silence coupled with the audible suffering and her coach yelling throughout the workout is striking. Dyer (1997) argues that the aesthetic of technology, like photographs and film, uses lighting strategies in a way that privileges whiteness and works to construct it. In the construction of “the glow of the white woman,” Dyer discusses standard visual effects that produce images of “idealized white women” who are bathed in light from above which creates “a glow rather than a shine” (1997, p. 122). As light streams onto her white skin from above, a glow radiates from her, not a shine as that would imply the effect of sweat, and as only animals, men, non-white, and sometimes working-class white women sweat, and thus, shine in photography (Dyer, 1997). In the scene above, Sara is not only dirty, suntanned, and in pain but she is shiny while dripping in sweat. Her exertion and sweaty shine

indicate Sara's status as a working-class subject, also as she displays characteristics counter to the “ideal white woman” we can appreciate the complicated gender performance displayed here. Sara is suffering and working hard as the “ideal” CrossFitter should, her strength and the power of her well-muscled body is apparent, and she has already been identified as a female athlete who outperforms the guys. However, her bleached blonde hair which (“could give white woman that glow”) and the makeup worn (devoted to avoidance of shine and creating a glow) are indicative of an emphasized femininity (Dyer, 1997, p. 122).

Annie Thorsdottir has been competing in CrossFit since the first Games back in 2009 and she won the title of “Fittest on Earth” in 2011 and 2012. Annie has been referred to as “the darling of CrossFit” and even exclaimed “I'm the original Dottir! And I'm still there” after her third-place finish in the 2017 Games. The year before she was forced to drop out of competition and she had not placed near the podium post-2012 until she placed third in 2017. However, she is still a central part of the CrossFit narrative depicted in the documentaries and mini-series. Annie is the original Dottir because she has been competing at the Games level since the first event back on the ranch in Northern California. In RtG1, Annie is reflecting on how the three of them push each other to get better and that, “we could actually have three Icelandic girls on the podium, how sick would that be?” The two other Icelandic women are focused on more than any other female athletes, Katrin Davidsdottir and Sara Sigmundsdottir. These three women are given a great deal of air time and interview time that allows them to have a voice and a position of power in the discourses surrounding CrossFit. They are even referred to as “Icelandic Queens” or “Nordic Goddesses” as can be seen in the first documentary when a male voice is heard over competition footage of Sara winning an event, “there’s a new Icelandic CrossFit Queen here at the Games and it’s Sara Sigmundsdottir!”

In RtG3, which is situated just after the third documentary in 2018, Sarah, Katrin, and Annie are all followed and interviewed as they prepare for the next season. Sara speaks to the strength and, indirectly, the superiority of the Icelandic people:

Sara: People are strong here in Iceland and mentally, and we're like four

[referring to herself, Katrin, Annie, and a successful male athlete from Iceland]

that are really good in our sport from a country that's 318, 000. It's unreal.

The Dottirs are showcased in a way that reproduces ideologies surrounding white superiority and white athletic power throughout these CrossFit texts. Rendering whiteness as visibly dominant and white female athletes as superior to others. However, the Dottirs are also showcased as an “other.”

In RtG2, Sara is shown bringing groceries into the house she is staying at, then food prepping. Yvette Clark—who is a friend of Rich Froning's that Sara is staying with—is in the kitchen with Sara. Sara is busy food prepping for herself and her “mama” Yvette. Yvette reflects on how Sara “is the female version of Rich” as she will randomly leave situations to go train in the garage at all times of the day. Sara pulls a pan of what looks like homemade yam fries onto the counter and says, “these look so good” and grabs a handful of them. When Sara grabs the food with her hand, Yvette laughs and states, “this is [how] the barbaric Viking eats dinner” and they both laugh. Sara is coded as foreign, as a Viking, and an “other” form of white than the American Yvette. However, she is understood to be a superior athlete which is highlighted in the comparison to Rich (four-times champion). Sara may be seen as an “other” form of white, a non-Anglo white, but she is seen as a champion. She is simultaneously fetishized as a Nordic other

while also being framed as a superior-white subject. Sara is shown getting out of a rental car in FoE3, she is grabbing her stuff and she is on her own with the interviewers,

[Sara, *singing*] My brother.

Do you see how gangster I am today? Sweatpants and a hoodie on. I just need to [get a gold] chain and I'm good. And then I'll rap for you. [Shown here laughing about her outfit and walking down the street]

[Interviewer, *laughs*] No.... yes!

Here we see Sara acting in a way that is seen as silly and casual. However, her actions are racially coded. She is fully aware that the sweatpants, hoodie, and chain are associated with black rapper and street culture in the United States. Without acknowledging black bodies, the viewer is still made aware of the black racialized meaning of this interaction. In his work *Revisiting the "White Negro"* Brayton discusses how white male skateboarders are able to be "evicted" from prime skate spots and are rarely detained by law enforcement, this is likely due to the "normative assumptions that attach to white skin... simply stated, although these white skaters are chastised for illegal skating, an occurrence that bolster their outsider status"—as skateboarding is criminalized— and North America is "much more hospitable to the white male traveler than to racially marked others" (2005, p. 363). In the interaction above, we see Sara acting in a racialized manner that is commonly policed on the streets of the United States, sometimes costing young black men their lives, however, she is jokingly calling herself "gangsta" and we see an example where "the hip-hop-style and particular gangsta fashions are unhinged from their purported black moorings and reinscribed upon a white body" (Brayton, 2005, p. 365). While this interaction seems to be in jest, just a moment where Sara recognized

that she is wearing clothing that could be ascribed to the gangsta style, this moment exemplifies obfuscation of white privilege.

In my analysis of the *Fittest on Earth* documentaries and *Road to the Games* series, I was constantly bombarded with an overwhelmingly white representation of bodies and voices. These documentaries show a superior, “ideal” CrossFit athlete who is white, even the leader jerseys that are given to the number one ranking athlete for each workout are white, as is the jersey given to the winners of the Games, and thus, “the Fittest on Earth” is quite literally white. While race is not directly spoken about within the films, it is a central issue throughout the representation of CrossFit through the construction of the particular identities of these white athletes. The Dottirs exemplify a Nordic non-Anglo whiteness that is othered from Western whiteness while simultaneity (re)producing white privilege.

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I have analyzed the *Fittest on Earth* documentaries, the *Road to the Games* mini-series and the new transgender policy in the 2019 CrossFit Rulebook in relation to themes of heteronormativity and gender representations. While female CrossFit athletes are shown to be just as good as the men, this supposedly transgressive ideal also works to naturalize the superior male athlete. I argue that CrossFit women are represented through popular media and discourse in a way that superficially challenges traditional hegemonic ideals surrounding “the ideal woman” but in a very limited capacity as the “ideal” CrossFitter is white and “the Fittest on Earth” and always will be wearing the white leader jersey. The new transgender policy that was released in 2019 works to counter any subversive narrative surrounding a “progressive” shift in the ways that female athletes are represented. By reinforcing the notion that the female athletes need to be “protected” from the superior, dominant male athletes this works to reproduce

traditional gender norms. In addition, the trans policy marginalized male to female trans athletes even further by implying that they must “prove” their femaleness. CrossFit media seems to deploy narratives surrounding equality in sport, but I argue that this equality is designed for a heterosexual, cis, white woman.

Chapter Three

The “Ideal” CrossFitter: Neoliberalism and Consuming CrossFit

Introduction

The ideal CrossFit participant is constructed through the willingness to participate in a lifestyle that promotes suffering and controlling one’s diet (James & Gill 2017). The *Fittest on Earth* documentaries and *Road to the Games* miniseries offer a new site of analysis to unpack the current trends in CrossFit neoliberal discourses that work to produce the “ideal” CrossFitter. This chapter expands on James and Gills’ (2017) analysis of alternative femininities in CrossFit by examining the ways that CrossFit women are portrayed as “just as good as the guys.” The female CrossFit athletes both superficially challenges and reproduce hegemonic ideals surrounding a “superior” male athlete.

In 2007, on a ranch in California, 70 athletes gathered for what became the inaugural CrossFit Games. While the CrossFit Games began in 2007, the company was first established by Greg Glassman in 2000. Dave Castro, a former Navy Seal, has been the long-time director of the Reebok CrossFit Games and his responsibilities have included programing all of the workouts that the athletes at the Games will need to perform for the competitions. In 2019, CrossFit HQ made the announcement that there would be a significant shift in the ways that the CrossFit Games, the Open, and the qualifying process would be run. They announced that the path to the Games will no longer be reliant on performance in the Open and will be determined by CrossFit sanctioned competitions. Many fans and athletes were shocked at the drastic changes. These changes seem to come with a new marketing strategy, including a redefinition of what CrossFit

is fundamentally considered. As of March 2019, the header “What is CrossFit?” has now been replaced with,

The Key to Health and Fitness: CrossFit is a lifestyle characterized by safe, effective exercise and sound nutrition. CrossFit can be used to accomplish any goal, from improved health to weight loss to better performance. The program works for everyone—people who are just starting out and people who have trained for years. (CrossFit.com, 2019)

Here we can appreciate the shift in definition of “what is CrossFit,” before 2019 CrossFit was commonly understood as a high intensity, sometimes controversial, workout regimen. The new definition implies a shift away from the intense nature of CrossFit, and a move towards aligning CrossFit with health and fitness. It is still unclear where all of the recent changes will take the public perception of CrossFit as a sport and fitness “lifestyle” and whether CrossFit HQ will consider their rebranding “successful.” Within the CrossFit community affiliates are also known as gyms, or more commonly “boxes,” which is of interest in a neoliberal context as it distances the individual members from the idea of being part of a franchise and part of a “community,” and reinforces ideologies of individualism and individual “lifestyle choices.”

As a result, CrossFit HQ is highly protective of its branding and has historically pursued legal action against any business or personal trainer who uses the term CrossFit without paying to be an affiliate as I became aware of when coaching. When I took my level-1 coaching certification I was taught the very limited ways that coaches and affiliates were able to use the CROSSFIT® trademark. It was made very clear that legal action would be taken against those who did not comply with the standards. Anecdotal evidence was given in the form of accounts of times CrossFit had sued individuals and gym owners who misused the name. Arguably, CrossFit

has been far more concerned with “the brand” than what services each affiliate is providing, thus protecting the illusion of the narrative. As long as each affiliate has CrossFit level-1 certified coaches—which can be purchased with 1,000 USD and attendance at a weekend course to achieve—and they pay to be an affiliate, then that gym can run and operate their business as they see fit.

As a business, CrossFit concerns itself with public image and narratives surrounding the sport and lifestyle. CrossFit created and produced the documentaries featured in this analysis. Altogether, there are prevailing themes surrounding how the “ideal” CrossFitter is built, the ways that an athlete must suffer to succeed, and ways in which the female CrossFit athletes are “just as good as the guys” which are (re)produced throughout the (Reebok) CrossFit community.

Neoliberalism, CrossFit, and Reebok

In 1978 Deng Xiaoping moved China’s economy away from a communist rule and towards an “open center of capitalism” in two decades (Harvey, 2005, p. 1). Shortly after, Margret Thatcher worked to “curb trade union power and put an end to miserable inflationary stagnation” in Great Britain (Harvey, 2005, p. 1), while in the United States Ronald Reagan strived to rejuvenate the economy through policies intended to “curb the power of labour, deregulate industry, agriculture, and resource extraction, and liberate the powers of finance both internally and on the world stage” (Harvey, 2005, p. 1). These pivotal historic changes sparked revolutionary movements that spread around the world and reworked global structures. Through fighting trade unions and reforming policy, neoliberalism became the dominant ideology which guided economic growth and free market values. Following David Harvey, neoliberalism is “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework

characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2005, p. 2). These ideological changes were strategically implemented globally by working with the International Monetary Fund (IMF)—an organization that offers loans to developing countries—to force deregulation and privatizations by demanding countries that needed loans to comply with these ideological shifts. If countries refused to comply with the demands of the ruling class of the time, here Thatcher and Reagan, countries who sought out loans would be denied or, such as the case when Mexico was forced into default over US loans in 1982 and the Reagan administration required institutional reforms in exchange for debt rescheduling (Harvey, 2005). Services were privatized, taxes were lowered, and then Western corporations were then able to go into developing, or poor countries, to exploit cheap labour. These corporations were able to make more money off of the backs of poor individuals, which further moved global wealth to the already wealthy. In short, neoliberalism has become the hegemonic mode of discourse incorporated into the dominant ideologies and “common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (Harvey, 2005, p. 3).

Neoliberal ideologies are useful in conceptualizing CrossFit as a brand and James and Gill (2017) discuss the ways that self-branding operated in a neoliberal context. CrossFit has worked to commodify fitness through the branding of fitness and has even self-branded as “the sport of fitness.” Not only does CrossFit operate as commodified fitness, but it is repetitive of branded fitness which offers a path for the promotion and self-branding of an individual lifestyle. From this, James and Gill (2017) argue fitness becomes connected to social capital through the investment of individual well-being. In their analysis, James and Gill found “CrossFit provides a way to ‘accomplish’ neoliberalism by collectivizing sport while still focusing on individual achievements; holding members accountable to the sport through diet, ritualized

workouts...and offering a way of living and identifying that ultimately constructs and defends an elite circle of’ those who are able to demonstrate the CrossFit lifestyle (2017, p. 720). As well, attention needs to be paid to the fact that CrossFit can be viewed as a large corporation. In 2015 Forbes estimated its worth as a brand to be 4 billion annually and that CrossFit Inc. takes in approximately 100 million dollars a year (Ozanian, 2015). In part, this success can be attributed to the relationship that has developed between CrossFit and Reebok.

In 2010 CrossFit HQ entered into a ten-year licensing agreement with Reebok. Reebok agreed to pay royalties on the CrossFit branded merchandise that Reebok sold and in return Reebok had exclusive rights to sell footwear, and apparel bearing the CROSSFIT® trademark, and not even CrossFit could produce or sell shoes or fitness apparel with the trademark (Barrows, 2018). As part of this agreement CrossFit required Reebok to provide athlete sponsorships and Reebok was to use their leverage to secure a broadcasting deal. In 2011 CrossFit announced the new 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games—previously just the CrossFit Games—and with this new partnership the prize money for the athletes rose to a total one-million-dollar purse, when split between individual athletes “male and female individual winners taking home \$250,000 each,” which has since increased to \$300,000 (a.u., 2019). This was also the first year that CrossFit and ESPN partnered to cover the Games to a wider audience where “ESPN3 covered the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games with running Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights” (a.u., 2019). According to a lawsuit filed by CrossFit on June 06, 2018, Reebok conducted dishonest business and avoided paying CrossFit at least 4.8 million dollars in royalties (Barrows, 2018). CrossFit claims that Reebok “fell from the collective consumer consciousness in the 1990s” and it was this agreement that “breathed new life into the Reebok brand” (Barrows, 2018, p. 7, 1). In the lawsuit CrossFit claims that over the last 30 years “CrossFit has worked

diligently and invested substantial resources in promoting the CROSSFIT® brand. CrossFit’s hard work to promote its brand has paid off.” Further, they claim that over “15,000 gyms across the world are licensed CrossFit affiliates” and each is required to pay CrossFit an annual fee of approximately three thousand USD to maintain their CrossFit credentials (Barrows, 2018, p. 7). Also, “CrossFit’s website average nearly 80 million hits per year; and the ‘CrossFit Games,’ which are televised on CBS, draw tens of thousands of participants and hundreds of thousands of views each year” (Barrows, 2018, p. 7).

While Reebok and CrossFit seem to have a complicated relationship, on the official CrossFit website Reebok is still shown as an official sponsor and sells CROSSFIT® trademark apparel and shoes. It would seem as if the 2019 season will be no different as the 2019 rulebook states “athletes must comply with CrossFit Inc.’s uniform requirements, and only official competition apparel or apparel or items expressly pre-approved by CrossFit Inc. will be permitted on the competition floor” (CrossFit, 2019, p. 19). Thus, Reebok is still involved with prize money and sponsorships of CrossFit athletes.

While Chapter Two outlined themes surrounding female CrossFit athletes as just as good, if not, better than the guys, the corporate domination of the Games offsets these “progressive” depictions of the CrossFit women. Performance is one aspect of a female athlete’s marketability; appearance and gender performance are also influential. In the films and documentaries, the Dottirs are featured more than any other female athletes and the only male who has a comparable stage presence is Mat. The Dottirs are all conventionally attractive and their well-muscled bodies are shown in various states of undress throughout the texts analyzed. Reebok is known for targeting female target audiences through sport advertisements and products, which have favored a select demography of affluent white women (Heywood and Dworkin, 2003). While the

athlete's sponsorships are rarely referenced, Reebok is required to provide sponsorships to CrossFit athletes per their agreement. There are examples in the texts of Katrin and Sara's sponsorships with Reebok and Rogue (a supplier of fitness equipment and official partner with CrossFit).

In FoE2, Katrin is shown designing her apparel and talking about working with Reebok and how she now gets more attention and is like a celebrity. She talks about her personal values and competing with herself to be the best version of herself "I want to be the best me." She is also shown developing and marketing her Reebok products in the RtG1 in a photo shoot, taking "action shots" as she pretends to jump over and over. When she looks back at the pictures she comments on her arm and how muscular it looks and laughs about it. In the RtG2, we watch Sara perform a swimming workout at a gorgeous cabin on a lake that Rich let her use. She is shown sitting on a deck table excitedly checking her phone. The screen shows an Instagram photo announcement for Rogue Fitness declaring Sara as part of the "Rogue Athlete Team" and Sara is heard saying "guess who's a Rogue athlete now. Yes!"

Katrin and Sara are both highly marketable female athletes, and this speaks to a wider problem with the ways that the free market facilitates a limited form of "empowerment." CrossFit benefits through the endorsement of these marketable women to further sell CrossFit as a fitness lifestyle through the sale of the shoes that Katrin designed and the fitness equipment Sara's fans are likely to purchase. The promotion of these women who are discursively constructed as "better than the guys" will in turn make CrossFit, Reebok, and Rogue money. These companies benefit from the neoliberal free market, thus, capitalizing on the exploitation of these "progressive" narratives on the backs of those individuals who are forced to work in poor countries in "sweatshops" to make the Reebok shoes and apparel that Katrin designed. While I

have defined instances of pariah femininity in the “outperformance” narratives of Sam and Sara, these narratives are constructed within a neoliberal framework that works to benefit from the exploitation of these “progressive” representations of femininity.

Consuming CrossFit, It’s a Lifestyle.

FoE1 begins with Katrin Davidsdottir speaking over old footage of her competing in gymnastics as a child, and pictures of her when she was young. Then Ben Smith is heard speaking over footage of his younger self: “I love the idea about CrossFit athletes and how they were like—the *ideal athlete* is someone who can do everything, run, bike, swim, lift weights, gymnastics...” Sara Sigmundsdottir is then shown lifting weights and stating, “this is my whole life.” She goes on to explain how the idea of CrossFit, coaching CrossFit, waking up to do CrossFit, and talking about CrossFit when at parties or with her friends has become her whole life. James and Gill show, “CrossFit makes the self-made man” through neoliberal discourses which promote individual achievement through the control of the self by participating in the CrossFit lifestyle (2017, p. 720). While James and Gill argue that CrossFit women are just as likely to become the “ideal participant,” my analysis of the documentaries and mini-series shows that women are not just as likely but are expected to comply and excel as the neoliberal “ideal” CrossFitter. Specifically, this occurs through the daily ritualistic consumption of healthy food and training that is the CrossFit lifestyle.

In keeping with poststructuralist concern with power relations exposing the types of technologies used and knowledges produced through the regulation of social activities, including sport, (Green, 2012), I explore ways neoliberalism has led to a rise in forms of self-regulation through “governmentality” where a citizen must be shaped, molded, and guided on how to responsibly act freely while navigating systems of domination (Frankel as cited in Green, 2012,

p. 42) Here the subject acquires meaning while simultaneously being made an object of subjection, which as Dean (1999) notes, can give the illusion of autonomy and agency. Through this narrative of empowerment, subjects are then encouraged to self-regulate and thus monitor how one conducts themselves in a culture that promotes and regulates freedom (Finlayson, 2003; Green, 2012; Newman, 2001). Such is the case with sport and exercise, and I add monitoring diet for performance, where exercise is used as a tool for self-development or self-help (Green, 2012). In my analysis CrossFit is often shown as a way for the average person to help himself or herself “be better” or “fight off disease.” Sara is shown in every documentary and the episodes of the *Road to the Games* focusing on her obsession with controlling her food intake and how she was a “fat kid” or “chubby kid.” Not only is Sara shown exercising, training, and competing, Sara is shown throughout the texts controlling her food intake in ways that she is obviously unhappy with, but she must participate in to “better” herself. She is shown drinking beet juice, juicing turmeric and ginger (“I don’t think I could eat this shit though”) and eating foods that she “hates” in order to achieve an elevated level of health.

These types of daily rituals involved with food prep and exercise show individual responsibility surrounding exercise and health, which does ideological work. These types of narratives shift the focus away from the benefits of social welfare and how access to healthcare and social factors play a role in individual health towards the responsibility of the individual subject who may or may not be participating in exercise and “healthy” eating. Given that we know “that poverty causes poor health by its connection with inadequate nutrition, substandard housing, exposure to environmental hazards, unhealthy lifestyles, and decreased access to and use of health care services,” the self-disciplined subject often unknowingly assumes the responsibility that was once considered the responsibility of government and policy for healthy

citizens (Silk & Andrews, 2012, p.8). One evident avenue for this shift has been through education and sport involvement and related policies.

Fusco defines neoliberalism in relation to health and the healthy citizen “as a set of policies, practices, and regimes that seek to extend the market economy (of health) into areas of the community, which have been previously organized and governed in other ways” (2012, p. 144). Neoliberal citizens are often characterized by assumptions of health, which can be understood as the production of healthy bodies through consumption (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Couture, 2015). Francombe and Silk (2012) investigate the ways reality television with a focus on weight loss, such as *the Biggest Loser*, forms discourses surrounding the citizen-subject. Here, reality television acts as the “secret theater of neoliberalism,” normalizing the linkages between self-work and labour (Francombe & Silk, 2012, p. 277). Narratives encouraging people to “take charge of their health” are often normalized, thus placing the responsibility of choices surrounding exercise, daily living, health care, and food intake onto the individual who is taught that “self discipline” alone is key in achieving success (Francombe & Silk, 2012, p. 229). Highlighting individuals as responsible for their health while simultaneously pathologizing those who are unable to help themselves “overcome their condition” (i.e. obesity), further problematizes the systems in place that encourage management of health concerns through consumption and engagement with the free-market (Couture, 2015). This type of healthist discourse, which frames general health as the personal responsibility of individuals, is often (re)produced in not only reality television but also in popular sport and sporting media.

Throughout the *Fittest on Earth* documentaries we see themes surrounding food and controlling one’s intake to optimize health and sporting performance. Athletes are shown preparing, consuming, or simply talking about their relationship with food. Often this is directly

related to the athletes' attempts to control their body in order to build the "ideal" body. The "ideal" CrossFitter is concerned with all of the "controllable" variables. In FoE2 Justin Bergh states,

when an athlete walks into the gym, they are doing the same thing that those people [the average CrossFitter] are doing, but they're doing so much more. You look at some of the top athletes, they've gone beyond controlling every single lifestyle factor—sleep, what passes their lips and goes into their bellies.

It is noteworthy that the individual's control over their lifestyle variables, which are often equated with health and wellness lifestyle factors, is considered to be the pathway to optimal athletic performance. This then implies they have a "choice." As is illustrated in RtG1 when Sara is shown sitting in bleachers next to a track with a bright sky behind her and a male voice is heard asking her questions,

Sara: Okay I love ice cream with lots of candy in it and cookie dough. Oh, that's so good. In L.A. they have this place called Yogurt Land. Wow. It has, like you can put as much cookie dough as you want in the ice cream. 'Oh it's just yogurt ice cream. I can put more candy.' [both laugh] You have to lie that to yourself to feel better. [Laughs] It's, aww, it's so good.

Male voice: But you're denying yourself it?

Sara: Yea, for now. [Sighs]

Man: How come?

Sara: I want to be the Fittest on Earth, and I have to eat right. I'll eat it straight after the Games.

After this exchange, dramatic music starts and Sara is shown running around the track and then we are shown the 2016 Regional footage where she fought Annie to the end for a first-place finish. To be the “Fittest on Earth” Sara must deny herself and “eat right” and optimize her training. The narrative here is that the “ideal” CrossFitter is self-disciplined in order to achieve her status as the champion, and benefit through sponsorship, fame, “glory,” and prize money.

Controlling not only what food does go into the body, but also denying oneself of desirable and yet “unhealthy” foods is a common narrative surrounding Sara. She is often shown talking about food longingly and is well known for her post-competition ritual; she refrains from having any of her favourite food—ice cream—until after a competition. In FoE3, we can appreciate how much joy and satisfaction ice cream brings to Sara and yet she denies herself in order to control the variables that she believes may affect her performance,

Male interviewer: You got a photo on your phone that you look at every night.

Sara: I looked at it every night before regionals. *[Sara is seen turning her phone around to show the man in the back seat of the car and a picture of a Ben and Jerry’s Ice cream tub is on the phone]*

Sara: My precious. It’s so good.

Unhealthy foods, such as ice cream, are viewed as a controllable variable and as the “ideal” CrossFitter is building the healthiest body through self-control. While the neoliberal ideal citizen is expected to have the self-discipline to partake in daily routines, the “ideal” CrossFitter is shown partaking in the self-discipline of training and controlling daily food intake. In another example found in FoE2, Katrin is discussing her grief over the loss of her grandmother, or “Gamma,” she speaks to what her Gamma would have wanted her to do. Katrin emotionally lets

the viewer know that her Gamma would not want her to “give up” and she would want Katrin to “do what she loves,” which is competing at the Games. She argues that “you can quit everything, I can put everything on hold and I can go get a tub of ice cream and cry.” Here Katrin is associating ice cream with giving up on her dreams and giving in to her emotions, in this case, grief. By denying herself ice cream she is presented as being in control of her grief and her athletic body. In “taking charge” of her health, she assumes the individual responsibility associated with the “ideal” neoliberal citizen or athlete.

In FoE2, we see themes surrounding controlling food intake, and denying oneself desirable food. Food here is discussed as a variable that will have direct effect on athleticism. There is a ritualistic diligence in the measuring, calculating, preparing, and consuming of food. Early in the film we see Katrin measuring and preparing food with a scale, even weighing out a banana down to the gram.

I think that you can move the needle outside the walls of the gym. I don't know what's gonna do it. I don't know if it's gonna be from self-reflection and diary. I don't know if it's gonna be from recording your macros. [At this point the film shows Katrin measuring a banana on a kitchen scale and then her back is to the camera as she prepares food and a plate of cooked eggs is in the foreground/ I don't know if it's gonna be from, make sure you don't have any processed foods. But we're gonna do all of it and hope that some of it works. Our athletes now are professional athletes.

During this portion of the film we hear the “expert” opinion of Katrin’s male coach, Ben Bergeron, in a back-and-forth shot of an interview with him, and his voice over Katrin’s

movements in the kitchen. Here, we can appreciate the connection between controlling “external” variables, such as food, and becoming a professional athlete.

In CrossFit we see an obsession with “clean eating” by avoiding toxins (i.e. no gluten, dairy, or eating “paleo”) that is often taken to the extreme; there is a connection here between “clean eating” and the “natural” body (Couture, 2015, James & Gill, 2017). The “natural” body then becomes a lifestyle choice, which was once only available to the wealthy (much like CrossFit itself). Often, throughout the documentaries, we see a great deal of focus on the quantity and quality of food individuals are eating. More often than not these themes are highlighted with a female athlete. In the following interaction from an episode of the RtG3 we see Sara Sigmundsdottir in the front seat of a car being interviewed by a man sitting in the back. As the viewer, we are unable to identify who the male voice belongs to:

Sara: Food prep is life [She is shown in the front seat of a car pouring what she identifies as almond milk into a cup]

Male interviewer: You are eating a bowl of cereal?

Sara: Yeah, it’s so good,

Male interviewer: What is it?

Sara: It’s a.. buckwheat flakes and almond milk.

Male interviewer: Oh okay.

Sara: Mmmmmm.

Male interviewer: What is buckwheat?

Sara: Buckwheat... I’m not really sure what it is even, and it’s just the healthiest thing, in the... like... that doesn’t have grain or gluten in it.

Male interviewer: You’re not eating grain or gluten? You’re paleo right now?

Sara: Yeah, but its not “paleo.” I can eat sweet potatoes.

Sara is concerned with the “healthiest thing” she can put in her body and focuses on what she can and cannot eat. She goes on more in this interview to discuss issues surrounding her friendships in high school and losing weight as a teenager, which will be discussed further in Chapter Three. Sara is shown to be always striving to achieve some level of health through a “clean diet” and ritualistic lifestyle choices, such as nightly food prep.

The “ideal” CrossFitter is concerned with individual control of what they consume, and the “ideal” CrossFit community is collectively concerned with “fighting chronic disease.” In FoE2, there is a distinct focus on the broader CrossFit community and the average person who goes to a “box.” After a dramatic introduction featuring footage from the top athletes the main commentators are speaking in an interview setting that cuts back and forth between them and footage of a variety of “regular” affiliates and calm melodic music can be heard. In these boxes we see a representation of the average CrossFitter; a variety of men and women of different ages, body types, and abilities are shown. There appear to be eight or nine different “boxes” shown in the cut scenes and it is noteworthy that in all of these scenes there is only one visibly non-white individual.

Rory: The CrossFit Games are fun to watch, and they are frickin’ cool. The misconception is that the CrossFit Games are a CrossFit. It’s not the case. In a typical affiliate, you walk in and you’re gonna see people just like you in a local community. You’re going to see your soccer moms, your high-powered CEO’s working out next to janitors, people from all walks of life, all trying to pursue a better version of who they can be.

Ben: What we are trying to accomplish with CrossFit.com programming and our affiliates is getting people good at life.

Justin: So, CrossFit's really a lifestyle. It's a philosophy, a belief. It's a way of taking care of your body and preparing yourself for anything that the world throws at you. [Annie can be seen running with an older woman, and yelling go, go, go, in the background] We're fighting chronic disease, getting people better. It's life goals, it's 'I wanna be a better person. I want to have more discipline, I want to lose a little bit of weight,' or just be better period.

Pat: Regular folk that have a job, have a family, have other things going on.

We're not trying to be the fittest person in the world. We just want to be in shape [shows an athlete in a wheelchair lifting dumbbells with able bodies athletes] and have a high quality of life and avoid all the metabolic diseases hitting the world. You can go into the gym, hit one work out, [only non-white athlete, a black man shown squatting heavy] hit it super hard, stretch a little bit, go home, eat clean, you're great.

Justin: And the CrossFit Games is very different, [cuts to footage of women competing at the games] and that it's a test to determine the number-one man, number-one woman in the entire world who is the fittest. [Katrin is shown on the podium in her white leader jersey on the podium from the year before]

This segment highlights the average soccer mom, janitor, and CEO who go to these gyms to “better” themselves, that controlling the physical body through monitoring one’s exercise and dieting behaviours will ensure that the individual is actively “fighting disease” and always

working towards the “best” version of themselves. The documentaries highlight a social health problem—here being presented as the rise of metabolic diseases—and the consumption of CrossFit is shown as the preferred solution for the individual to take control of their life and stave off the “problem.” However, CrossFit has an incredibly high price tag. While some estimates place monthly memberships range from 120 to 225 dollars, in Calgary, Alberta, Reebok CrossFit Ramsay charges 250 dollars a month if you do not commit to six month or a year membership (Blackburn, 2019; reebokcrossfitramsay.com/memberships, 2019). I know from coaching at FUEL in Lethbridge that a monthly membership jumped from 129 to 185 dollars a month in December of 2018. In this segment the narrative states that people “from all walks of life” participate in CrossFit, and yet, there are many individuals from lower socioeconomic status that would never be able to afford such an expensive commitment. It seems then, that in order to consume the CrossFit lifestyle one would actually have to have access to a disposable income. Also, it seems as if the “average” CrossFitter is predominantly white.

In this section I have discussed how the “ideal” CrossFitter is inextricably linked to the ideal neoliberal citizen through the ideals surrounding individual control and responsibility in matters of health and consumption. The “ideal” CrossFitter is consumed with self-discipline and the discourses produced surrounding female athletes connects the self-made woman with strict control of food intake. The *Fittest on Earth* documentaries and the *Road to the Games* series highlight messages surrounding individual responsibility of health and demonstrate how the “ideal” body is built through the consumption of highly controlled quantities of “healthy” foods and the denial of “unhealthy” foods. Finally, in regard to individual health and consumption, these films (re)produce the narrative that in order to be an “ideal” and healthy citizen who “fights

off metabolic disease” one must consume CrossFit, however, there are many who are excluded from this opportunity to “better” themselves.

Sport, Labour, and how Suffering Equals Success

In the first four minutes of FoE1, Sam Briggs is shown skipping while her voice over states, “I genuinely enjoy pushing myself, to see how far I can go.” Then, the voice of Sean is heard exclaiming, “finishing second on a broken foot, are you kidding me?” while Sam’s swollen foot is shown being taped. The neoliberal, “self-made” ideal CrossFit participant is expected to endure pain and suffering through injury, discomfort of WODs, and eating “paleo” (James & Gill, 2017). I argue that throughout the *Fittest on Earth* series the “ideal” CrossFitter is the professional athlete who takes the “self-made” values to the extreme. The athletes that make it to the Games are considered superior to all others. As Rory states in FoE2, “if you get to the CrossFit Games, it means that you’re in the top one percent of the world’s best athletes, bar none.”

Early in RtG1, Sara is shown in an interview reflecting on how she never stuck with a sport as a kid and she would often make up excuses to get out of it. Like one time, she put ketchup on a bandage and placed it on her knee so she could get out to get out of swimming practice. At the end of the show she is shown lifting a heavy sandbag overhead and sprinting up and down stairs with her voice over stating,

Sara: I want to win the CrossFit Games because I want to prove that all the girls that gave up on sports when they were younger and didn’t think that they would do anything, that everything is possible if you work hard for it.

In this example we can appreciate how hard the women of CrossFit work, specifically, Sara wants to show other women/girls that they are able to “work” hard and achieve “their dreams” through sport.

Brohm (1978) argues that sport structures are tied to capitalism and is dependent on the development and production driven by bourgeois capitalistic society. Sport relies on competitive selection which mirrors capitalist values, Brohm states—which is very much still relevant today—“the driving forces in sport—performance, competitiveness, records—are directly carried over from the driving forces of capitalism: productivity, the search for profit, rivalry and competitiveness (1978, p. 50). Athletes are then seen as workers and sport acts as a structure that reproduces techniques that reduce athletes to cogs in a machine. The body becomes a machine that produces labour through repetitive training, specialization, precise timing, records and suffering (Brohm, 1978). Social labour, or work, can be understood as the driving need for folks to survive in any given social situation, which then reduces them to a “measurable productive force” (Rigauer, 1981, p. 13). In industrial societies individuals are expected to participate in the marketplace by producing goods and/or services while competing with one another for economic gain, which then determines individual socioeconomic status. Thus, achievement is measured in productivity, social mobility, and material rewards (Rigauer, 1981). Individual athletes strive to optimize their athletic training in order to set records and outperform competitors and in this there is a level of “masochistic tendencies” that are obvious in training and “the need to suffer now occurs” (Rigauer, 1981, p. 23). Bodies in sport are often pushed to their physical limits and this effort results in a voluntary acceptance for individual suffering by the athletes. The pain endured is glorified as “the sporting legend is above all else a story of the pain barrier, of going to the limits of endurance” (Brohm, 1979, p. 23). Athletes devote their entirety to the suffering

that comes with training and “pushing themselves to their limits.” It becomes expected, entertainment even, as Pat states in FoE2, “I like seeing the athletes suffer.”

Near the end of the first day of competition in the FoE1 the athletes learned they would be completing “Murph” which is a “hero WOD.” A hero WOD is a particularly difficult workout that is named after a fallen soldier. As the athletes were getting ready for the work out, there was very dramatic music playing and it was dubbed a “turning point for many athletes” by Rory because athletes did not plan the work out to “their particular work capacity” and the athletes tried to outwork their competitors and did not stick to their own game plan. The film shows footage of the event with commentators voicing over and cut scenes to athletes reflecting on the work out; at the end of the work out there was a great deal of suffering and some heat injuries from a combination of the effort of the work done and the California heat. Pat Sherwood is shown in an interview between cut scenes of Kara Webb being taken off the field on a stretcher,

I wouldn't pass out during Murph, because if it started to hurt really really bad I would slow down a little bit cause I don't want to be in that much pain. [laughs] I wouldn't fall unconscious but you had people so mentally tough, like Kara Webb or others, that will hit that point that I would hit and go like, woah I am going to slow down, and she doesn't.

Annie Thorsdottir is also shown struggling through the event and later it is learned that she suffered from a heat injury and had to withdraw from the Games. Both these women are willing to work so hard that they sacrifice their wellbeing, their safety even. Sport demands machine like athletes (or workers) to become a part of the capitalist system. Thus, sport is an ideology which “reproduces and strengthens the ideology of alienated labour: work, continuous effort, struggle, the cult of transcending one's own limitations, the cult of suffering, the cult of self-denial, self-

sacrifice” (Brohm, 1979, p. 50). We can appreciate that CrossFit promotes a cult of suffering made up of workers who are willing to go to the extreme, even sacrifice themselves to achieve the desired outcome. The “ideal” CrossFitter here is a female athlete who is willing to give it all for the “greater good.”

Throughout the *Fittest on Earth* series, particularly the first two films, we see the glorification of suffering and pain. A persistent theme emerges in which training for the sport is equivalent to struggle, pain, and suffering. Pain and sacrifice become expected of “ideal” CrossFit athletes and is essentially glorified. For example, during the last day of competition in FoE1 after Mat had lost his lead the day before to Ben, he is heard stating, “this will hurt, I will die before I lose this workout.” Mat puts his performance above his own safety and wellbeing in order to claim the championship. The “ideal” CrossFitter is not only glorified through their athletic achievements but also through the process of the production of performance, or “productive-orientated” capitalistic labour, and due to their ability to withstand pain to “endure,” the “ideal” CrossFitter is also considered better than the average “worker,” to be super human even. The “ideal” CrossFitter is understood to be a hard worker who will sacrifice her body, time, and comfort in order to achieve a glorified athletic status that offers the potential of social mobility by winning the prize money, gaining Reebok sponsorships, and celebrity status.

Chapter Overview

In this chapter I have argued that the *Fittest on Earth* and *Road to the Games* texts work to establish that the “ideal” CrossFitter is built through individual effort and adhering to the CrossFit lifestyle of ritualistic training, and displaying self-discipline, specifically, through relationships with food. Further, I suggest that CrossFit athletes are expected to tolerate levels of

pain that are machinelike, thus reproducing systems of sport as labour and the “ideal” CrossFitter will suffer for success. CrossFit is a business that carefully curates the public image surrounding the sport; it markets, promotes, and sells the CrossFit lifestyle through the promotion of the neoliberal “ideal” CrossFit subject. The “ideal” CrossFitter is a self-disciplined athlete who uses daily, ritualistic, control of food intake and training to an extreme level. The texts in my analysis show that the responsibility of health and building the “ideal” body falls onto the shoulders of the individual and through the consumption of CrossFit and those who can afford to participate are able to achieve health and fight off disease. CrossFit athletes can also be understood as workers who produce labour and thus reproduce individual responsibility associated with work ethic and effort. CrossFit athletes are essentially great at nothing but good at everything and through their ability to suffer through their training at fitness they have become the “ideal” CrossFitter.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

This thesis examines how CrossFit athletes are shown, talked about, represented, and understood in contemporary sport discourse, specifically focusing on the films created by CrossFit surrounding the Reebok CrossFit Games. My research is significant as CrossFit has become a highly popular, widespread fitness phenomenon and yet the academic literature on CrossFit has yet to discuss much of the ideological work that CrossFit media (such as social media, CrossFit HQ, documentaries, and the live streaming of the Games) is doing. Further, to the best of my knowledge, my work is the first to look at the *Fittest on Earth* and *Road to the Games* series. Also, my work is the first to examine the ideological reproductions of an “ideal” white CrossFitter and the reproduction of heteronormative narratives and thus provides a meaningful contribution to the existing literature. My research provides perspective on not only the “CrossFit community” but also gives insight into the discursive (re)productions of ideologies surrounding female athletes, especially “superior” white female athletes. By highlighting the ways that CrossFit athletes, in particular, the Dottirs, are represented in these films, we come to appreciate the reproduction of neoliberal narratives that show the “ideal” CrossFitter as inextricably linked to the ideals surrounding individual control, consumption, and responsibility towards matters of health.

My analysis of the *Fittest on Earth* documentaries and *Road to the Games* short series demonstrates what Francombe and Silk (2012) describes as narratives which encourage individuals to “take charge of their health” (p. 229); through self-discipline and the deployment of discourses surrounding self-control and the healthy, “ideal” citizen who also has a “clean” or “natural” body which is then achieved through the consumption of CrossFit. Often these

narratives are strategically constructed surrounding the daily lives of the female CrossFit athletes featured in the films. Not only do we see the deployment of discourses about the “ideal body” but we see the (re)production of ideologies surrounding the expectations that a man is “naturally” a superior athlete, despite the common narrative within the CrossFit community that “girls are just as good as the guys.” The (white) women of CrossFit are depicted as having the capacity to “outperform” the men, however, this image is used to sell CrossFit and Reebok to mass audiences. The “progressive” image of female athletes who are “just as good as the guys” is suspect as CrossFit and Reebok actively exploit this image for capital gain. This image of “just as good as the guys” is situated in a narrative that disrupts any real progress in how gender is portrayed in CrossFit. By pointing out Sam Briggs as abnormal in her accomplishments, the viewer is reminded that it is abnormal for a woman to be better than a man, which reinforces the notion that men are inherently better at sport. This message that women are not as good as the men is further propagated in the new trans policy for the CrossFit Games, as it reinforces the myth that the female athletes need to be protected from the male athletes in order to preserve the “fairness” of sport. The “ideal” female CrossFitter is shown to be a body that subscribes to healthiest ideals, however, female athletes are idealized but in a limited capacity as the “ideal” CrossFitter is also a white (sometimes non-Anglo) woman.

Also, there is the deployment of discourses that idealized a Nordic, non-Anglo white woman “other,” specifically the Dottirs. Throughout this analysis, almost every female athlete was represented in a way that centered her athletic career as well as her day to day life around a man. In my analysis, I identified two strategies deployed to align the lives of female CrossFitters, specifically the Dottirs, in relation to a heteronormative way of living. First, a female athlete will often be identified as someone's wife or girlfriend; secondly, an athlete's success will be defined

in relation to, or somehow connected to a male coach or “expert” in her life. While the women of CrossFit are often framed in a heterosexual partnership, those who are openly gay are often discursively silenced as these strategies will not be deployed in relation to their lives and athletics. Essentially, the “ideal” female CrossFitter can be better than the guys, can suffer like an ideal capitalist worker, and benefit through celebrity status, and gain wealth through sponsorships and prize money—as long as she is a “sweetheart and beautiful,” heterosexual, white CrossFit woman.

Areas for Future Research

As the outcomes of the new CrossFit Transgender policy are not known or knowable at this time there is potential for research in this area, especially with the consideration of popular athletes in the news who are facing discrimination due to their bodies testosterone levels, i.e. Castor Semanya and the IAAF ruling regarding testosterone suppression as her body “naturally” produces higher levels than they allow for female athletes (Dunbar, 2019). While it could be argued that by suppressing her testosterone hormones her body is no longer “natural” and she would not fit an “ideal” athletic body, so it would seem that preserving the “superior” male body somehow trumps a “natural” body. While there are varying rules and standards across different sports, this would be an area for future research into the ways that CrossFit fits in the greater sporting discourse. Not only are gender non-conforming bodies brought to attention in sport, and specifically in CrossFit with their policy that permits cases like Caster Semanya, but female coaches are also noteworthy through lack of attention.

Throughout the *Fittest on Earth* and *Road to the Games* series, there was not a single female coach represented. This absence does discursive work, and this is an area that could potentially bring a greater understanding to the CrossFit community. Even though there seems to

be a lack of representation at the Games level, there is the potential that female coaches are quite active within the community and what roles and themes these coaches (re)produce are valuable. As there are no visible female coaches at the Games throughout these films, there is a need to research the roles, representations, and influences of female coaches in the greater CrossFit community. CrossFit HQ offers courses and certifications for their coaches, from Level 1 CrossFit coach to specialty certifications like “Adaptive Training.”

The CrossFit website offers a “CrossFit Specialty Course: Adaptive Training” which is advertised as a “single-day course designed to teach trainers and athletes how to make CrossFit accessible to impaired athletes. Participants will learn how to train athletes with a wide range of impairments” (a.u., 2019). CrossFit is often associated with military connections, as can be seen with their “hero WODs” where a workout is named after a “fallen” military war hero and amputees are often the focus in these adapted CrossFit classes (which was briefly highlighted in the second documentary). There is a potential connection here to the many adaptive programs and social media accounts that CrossFit dedicates to training and including people with various physical and psychomotor disabilities.

Social media sources like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook are becoming incredibly influential and easily distributed with the ease of apps and “smart” technology. There exists the “Instafamous” Instagram model who becomes famous for posting fitness content through images of their body and daily routines, also their content is highly consumed through these platforms. This influence is important to recognize as “media and sport [are] powerful socializing agents in the distribution of gendered norms in much of western society” (Pedersen as cited, Knapp, 2010, p. 689). Media includes many types of information distribution and CrossFit social media platforms are extensive; CrossFit HQ has millions of “followers” on all three popular platforms

and many of the CrossFit athletes are highly active and followed on various sites, as of May 2019 Katrin Davidsdottir alone boasted 1.5 million followers on her personal Instagram account. These platforms offer a potentially rich site to further analyses discourses surrounding the CrossFit community.

My analysis was limited to film and the discursive representations throughout the documentaries and mini-series, however, there are still many questions that could be addressed through other methods in respect to representations of CrossFit athletes. As the visual, auditory, and narrative representations throughout film tell us something, there is still much that can be gained from other methods. It could prove to be valuable to consider and include various methods, such as interviews or potentially (auto)ethnographic approaches to help further our understandings of the experiences, representations, and attitudes surrounding CrossFit.

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Appendix

6.01 - TRANSGENDER POLICY CrossFit is committed to ensuring that all CrossFit athletes have equal access and opportunities to participate in CrossFit events in a manner that is fair to all competitors while preserving the integrity of the sport. Transgender athletes are welcome to participate in the CrossFit Games in accordance with the requirements set forth below. [return to table of contents]

6.02 - PARTICIPATION IN THE OPEN All athletes may select their gender. Athletes who register in a gender category other than the gender assigned to them at birth, or different than the gender by which they have identified on CrossFit's website, are representing to CrossFit that:

- Their gender in their everyday life matches their registration gender.
- They have obtained civil documents with their registration gender identified. (e.g., state ID or driver's license). Athletes who cannot meet the criteria above may provide medical or other evidence satisfactory to CrossFit establishing that they self-identify as the gender stated in their registration. [return to table of contents]

6.03 – PARTICIPATION IN EVENTS OTHER THAN THE OPEN (E.G., THE ONLINE QUALIFIER AND THE GAMES) Transgender males: Athletes who transition from female to male must satisfy the requirements set forth in section 6.02 above.

Transgender females: Athletes who transition from male to female must satisfy the requirements set forth in section 6.02 above and meet the following requirements: i. Athletes must, prior to competing in the Online Qualifier or confirming their participation in the Games, contact support@crossfitgames.com to receive a Declaration Form to complete, declaring that their gender identity is female. That declaration cannot be changed, for any sporting purpose, for a minimum of four years. ii. Athletes must demonstrate that their total testosterone level in serum has been below 10 nmol/L for at least 12 months prior to their first CrossFit competition (with the requirement for any longer period to be based on a confidential case-by-case evaluation by CrossFit, considering whether or not 12 months is a sufficient length of time to minimize any advantage in women's competition). iii. The athlete's total testosterone level must remain below the 10 nmol/L throughout the period of desired eligibility to compete in the female category. iv. The information provided by the athlete in sections (i)-(iii) above will be reviewed by CrossFit, which shall determine, in its sole discretion, whether the athlete will be allowed to participate as a female. v. Compliance with these requirements may be monitored by CrossFit through additional serum testing. In the event of non-compliance, the athlete's eligibility for female competition will be suspended for 12 months. An in-competition report of a serum total testosterone level ≥ 10 nmol/L will, subject to section 6.04, result in the disqualification of the results of that competition and the return of any prize money or awards. [return to table of contents]

6.04 – EXCEPTIONS TO SUBSECTION 6.03 • As an exception to sections 6.03 (ii) and (iii), athletes having a serum testosterone level ≥ 10 nmol/L may continue to participate in the female category if they satisfactorily demonstrate to CrossFit that they have a genetic condition that affects the bioavailability of their serum testosterone, such as hyperandrogenism (e.g., PCOS in rare cases), androgen insensitivity syndrome or 5-alpha reductase deficiency. • For purposes of

events held in 2019, CrossFit, in its sole discretion, may reduce the 12-month period set forth in section 6.03 (ii) for particular events. [return to table of contents]

6.05 – THERAPEUTIC USE EXEMPTION REQUIRED FOR THE USE OF A BANNED SUBSTANCE Any transgender athlete planning to use any banned substance, as defined in Appendix A of the CrossFit Drug Testing Program, as part of a medically supervised gender transition, must first obtain a Therapeutic Use Exemption as provided in Section 18 of that policy. Nothing in this Transgender Policy will excuse an athlete’s failure to strictly comply with the CrossFit Drug Testing Policy. [return to table of contents]

6.06 – APPEAL BY A TRANSGENDER ATHLETE Any transgender athlete whose registration to compete in a particular gender category has been rejected by CrossFit under section 6.03 (iv), or otherwise by CrossFit under this section 6, may appeal that decision as follows:

- Athletes shall have 10 business days following receipt of the decision rejecting their gender registration to submit their written petition of appeal explaining why that decision should be overturned.
- Following a review of the athlete’s petition of appeal, CrossFit will, in a timely manner, provide its written decision, including supporting reasons, either denying or granting the appeal.
- In extraordinary cases, athletes may request a personal hearing and it will be at CrossFit’s sole discretion to grant or deny such a request. Athletes may have an advocate or other representative present, if they so desire.
- CrossFit personnel will confer and decide upon the appeal. Any decision made by CrossFit on the petition of appeal shall be final and not subject to any further appeal. [return to table of contents]

6.07 – OTHER CHALLENGES TO THE GENDER CLASSIFICATION OF AN ATHLETE Any athlete registered for the CrossFit Games may challenge the gender classification of an athlete by sending a confidential written request to support@crossfitgames.com. That request will be reviewed by CrossFit in such manner as it deems appropriate. In the interest of confidentiality, the receipt of the challenge will be acknowledged, but no further information will be provided to the challenging party. CrossFit may also conduct a review and evaluation of an athlete’s gender classification on its own initiative. Except for the transgender athlete’s right to appeal set forth in section 6.06, no other athlete or person shall have any standing to challenge a decision of CrossFit under this section 6.